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# An Exploratory Study of Employees’ Perceptions on Service Quality in the Examinations Council of Zambia

by

Pranyou Promkaew  
Ronald Mwelwa Tembo

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Supervisor: Tommy Shih  
Examiner: Veronika Tarnovskaya



# Abstract

Service quality has been recognised as an important aspect for service organisations, however few studies have focused on service quality in public organisation, especially from the employee's point of view. Employee perceptions are considered vital to the service quality in organisations as employees directly interact with customers and provide the services. Thus, this thesis aims to provide an understanding of how employees perceive service quality in public organization and to gain deeper insight of the dimensions influencing employees' perception by using SERVQUAL instrument, a model used to measure service quality, as theoretical base. Considering the aim of the study, a qualitative strategy was used in order to reveal different aspects of service quality from employees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees who were involved in service delivery at service centers of Examinations Council of Zambia. This study found ten themes on how employees perceive service quality. Five themes were revealed from the five original dimensions of SERVQUAL which are Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy and the remaining five were based on the new dimensions added, revealed from the empirical data, analysis, and literature reviews which are Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Employees Empowerment, Convenience and Manpower. This thesis indicates that service quality is a complex issue which should be researched using special sets of dimensions depending on the organization's setting. In a practical view, the ten dimensions are needed to be addressed in the organisation in order to deliver a quality service. Over and above this, the study thereby enhances knowledge regarding the employees' perception on service quality and further contributes to the service quality literature in employees' point of view.

**Keywords:** service quality, employees' perception, SERVQUAL, public organisation, qualitative approach

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Pranyou Promkeaw

Ronald Mwelwa Tembo

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# 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study to understand the research problem. An overview of the main concepts, problem formulation, research question, purpose to the study, aimed thesis contributions and limitations are presented. The last section of this chapter gives the outline of the thesis.

## 1.1 Background

Public service has been considered as the vehicle for powering economic development through the implementation of government policies and programmes (Times of Zambia, 2015). It makes the state noticeable to the community, creating link and a bond between the government and the people or the general public (Van de Walle & Scott, 2009). According to Seitz (2017), public services are those services that public sectors are accountable for; police departments, fire departments, sanitation, water, gas, streetlights, and education, all of these may be considered public services. Reid (2011) emphasizes that public sectors are working in an age of dynamic global economics and most of its employees are facing crisis in confidence when it comes to service delivery. Moreover, Melisidou and Theocharis (2007), state that the importance of different sectors within the public service to the global economy has increased concerns on the level of service quality being offered by the practitioners to the consumers. Thus, service quality is a major concern to many service sectors and plays an important role in generating competition of products and services within the market (Selvakumar, 2016).

Over the years, public sectors showed valuable improvements on providing services such as application of electronic services and use of technological advancements to further serve the public (Daniels, 2011). However, despite the improvements in the conditions of service, reform initiatives progressively implemented, and even high academic credentials possessed by most public service workers, the public continue to bemoan the performance of public service (Chongo & Mengo, 2016). Thus, it becomes imperative for the public service to make service delivery more effective and efficient in order to improve performance.

Moreover, the level of service quality performance reflects employees and management of any organization. In a study about the employees' role in service delivery, Ye and Liang (2010) proved that employees hold an extremely important role on good service delivery with emphasis on service quality delivery. Reid (2011) adds that the public sector employees "serve a threefold

vital role as the provider of public goods, guardians of the commons and promoters of a civic life essential to our communities” (p.3).

On the other hand, poor service quality at any time leads to customer dissatisfaction (Selvakumar, 2016). It has been observed that poor service quality in education (public sector) contributes to high stress levels for both staffs and clients and has a negative influence on relationships at all levels of service delivery (Education Review Office, 2016). Unsatisfactory public service quality also leads to loss of profit, reputation, employees, loyal and potential customers (Olga, 2015).

For decades now, Zambia has been implementing Public Sector Reform Programmes (PSRP) to stimulate the efficiency of the public sector and improve service delivery to Zambian citizens (Mulimbika, De Waal & Goedegebuure, 2015). In view of this, it is a strategy by the Zambian Government to make the public service more responsive, service oriented and accountable in the delivery of timely and quality services to all Zambians (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2013). However, despite some positive changes and improvements noted in the public sector, Ng’ona (2013) notes with concern that shoddy service delivery and the poor customer service culture has been perceived to be offered by most public sector players in Zambia.

At the moment, where the public clearly show increasing demand for timeliness and quality in service delivery, Chongo and Mengo (2016) urge the public organisations in Zambia to make frantic efforts and become innovative to achieve customer satisfaction. Therefore, the provision of service quality needs to be thoroughly assessed by employees themselves to ensure that the public service begin to focus on developing interventions which are responsive to the needs of the citizens in Zambia.

## 1.2 Problem Formulation

The services of public organisations should aim to efficiently meet the needs of the general public to maintain a satisfactory performance on providing service quality. Service delivery, ideally, should be fast, complete, reliable, and remarkable in order to achieve a good standing image in the minds of the citizens, create a strong link and bond among the people. However, Linell (2008), states that service delivery of most public organizations are still rated “poor” by the people specifically on the quality of services they receive. This include; employees not acting on problems, not acting quickly enough (or as promised), not acting correctly, and not being informed of problems. Linell (2008), adds that the incompetence of the public sectors or any organization in providing service quality leads to customers’ dissatisfaction and as satisfaction levels go down, the loyalty of customers drops sharply, problems arising from their experiences trigger them to be angry, and worst, provoking them to spread words against the organization.

Like any other public organizations, the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) provides public services to Zambian citizens. Those who access public education undergo an examination system administered by the ECZ to determine their learning achievements in line with the national curriculum (Government of the Republic of Zambia Act, 1983). Apart from this, ECZ also provides post examination services to graduates who wish to enroll into college or university and even those seeking for employment (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2014). Other services that ECZ provides include; verification/certification of school results, replacements of lost certificates, equating of foreign results/qualifications to local qualifications and any other general enquiries on examinations (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2014). Moreover, ECZ has been mandated by law to verify academic qualifications for all Zambian citizens vying for political office (Zande, 2016). Considering these obligations, ECZ must then offer a satisfying service quality by meeting client's expectations with the services they offer.

Under this backdrop, as the demand for services continue to rise from the ECZ (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2016a), it calls for a delivery system which achieves value for money by those seeking public services (Crown, 2010). Efficiency and speed which are highly quality factors become important to the customers in meeting the growing demand for services (Ankrah, 2012). Serrat (2010) states that the provision of service quality is critical in establishing customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and reputation. Therefore, it can be argued that inefficiency and delayed delivery of council services may lead to angry customers and damaged reputation of the organisation. Hence, there is a need to optimise operations to achieve service quality.

Previously, ECZ had only one small office at the ECZ main secretariat in the capital city of Lusaka, that was used to provide services to the customers (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2014). This is the office where customers from different parts of Zambia would come to request for different services provided by the institution. Considering factors in providing service quality, this resulted in service delivery delays and unsatisfactory customer experiences (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2014). Further, this system inconvenienced ECZ employees who had other core council duties to take care of, since they had to be part of the secretariat at the same time. So, in order to reduce bureaucracy, provide assistance to the customers, and to make administration of post examinations queries more receptive to political and societal demands, the ECZ created the Lusaka service centre in 2014 (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2014). In October 2016, the ECZ launched another service centre in the town of Kitwe as a way of bringing services closer to the people (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2016b). Through these service centres, ECZ have shown significant innovation in public service delivery.

The growing demand for services from the service centre implies that service quality has to be provided to satisfy the demands of the customers (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2016a). Despite this development to serve customers better, it is not known whether the provision of service quality and employee satisfaction were given consideration when the service centres

were established. Heathfield (2017) suggests that employee satisfaction is an aspect in employee's goal achievement, motivation, and positive employee morale in the organisation. Gilmore (2001) also emphasized that there is need even for operations managers to exert more attention on employee's empowerment by ensuring that they take a lead in providing management with alternatives in improving the service processes.

Furthermore, it is argued that employees reflect the image of the organisation which affects their perception about service quality and in return affects the feedback of the customers (Daniel & Alamelumangai, 2013). This is supported by Musaba, Musaba and Hoabeb (2014) who maintain that employees are the internal customers of the organisation whose work perception determine the service quality offered to the external customers. However, few studies have addressed service quality from the employees' perspective (Al-Ababneh, 2016). In this regard, it becomes imperative for a public institution such as the ECZ to look at the perception of the employees regarding the services offered to the customers. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, previous research focusing on the employee perspective on service quality is limited, especially in qualitative approach. Most of the studies were focusing in the consumer perceptions and were using quantitative approach. Thus, this study will focus on the employee's perspectives on service quality in the ECZ using qualitative approach in order to gain deeper understanding in this area. By studying the employees' perception of service quality, Gilmore (2001) maintains that the study will unveil practical perspectives on how and what makes them happy in order to improve the services. For example, a previous study on service quality as perceived by the employees in the hotel industry revealed that employees feel they were not receiving fair treatment and care from their employers, nor being valued by the company, nor empowered, thus, affecting service quality provision (Musaba, Musaba & Hoabeb, 2014). The study on call centre employees perception moreover, revealed problems on human resources management and suggests that managers should focus on improving human resource management than of tangible dimensions in service delivery (Ramseook-Munhurrun, Naidoo, & Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that these factors might affect employees of public organizations as well making this study essential.

By undertaking the employee's perception therein, it will not only help the ECZ to receive different perspectives, it may assist in developing efficient service quality strategies which will also earn trust and customer satisfaction for the various post examination services offered.

### 1.3 Purpose and Research Question

As there is a need to explore employees' opinions and understanding on the concept of service quality, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how service quality is perceived by the employees of ECZ. In view of this, the purpose will be achieved by identifying how employees perceive the different operational issues and identifying areas of improvements at the service centre to achieve the desired service quality. The following research question will be addressed:

## **How is service quality perceived by employees in the Examinations Council of Zambia?**

The thesis implies qualitative inquiry into employees' response towards the service provided at ECZ. Moreover, in order to assess the effectiveness of service quality in totality at the ECZ, the SERVQUAL Model will be assessed and each dimension will be evaluated. The following sub question is thus formulated: *What are the important dimensions of service quality from an employee's perspective?*

### **1.4 Aimed Thesis Contributions**

The aimed contribution of the thesis is threefold. First, it contributes to the literature on service quality in public sector organisations by adding the understanding of the employees' perception on service delivery in the context of a developing country. This enhances the knowledge on service quality as there is limited research deliberately focusing on the employee's perspective especially from the education sector. The employee's perceptions revealed by this study will offer insights by revealing the operational aspects and how those aspects ought to be addressed to improve public service delivery.

Second, the thesis enriches the literature on service marketing by assessing the dimensions considered to be important in service quality in the public sector within the SERVQUAL Model. To reach this goal, the researchers of this thesis specifically claim that there could be additional dimensions to service quality from the employee's perspective which needs to be thoroughly explored.

Third, the study will provide managers with insights into pertinent areas within the operations of the service centres which should be pursued in order to add value to the provision of service quality to the public. By enhancing the understanding of employees on service quality, it will be possible for organisations to renew their strategies and focus on interventions to achieve customer satisfaction.

### **1.5 Research Limitations**

This thesis focuses on employees' perception of service quality at the ECZ. It will, however, be limited to the opinions and viewpoints of employees operating and involved in the service centre. Hence, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine consumers' perceptions of service delivery at the ECZ. Moreover, since this thesis aims to explore employees' perception of service quality, it will be determined using the SERVQUAL model as a theoretical base in understanding operational dynamics within the ECZ. In view of this, this thesis does not take the views of the customers of the ECZ.

Finally, as this thesis seeks to explore how employees perceive service quality at the service centres, the focus of the empirical section and subsequent analysis lies on the employees' perceptions of the phenomenon. Further, as this thesis narrowly examines employees' perceptions of service quality, the corresponding marketing and other related activities of the ECZ will not be studied.

## 1.6 Outline of the Research

The thesis consists of six chapters which provide detailed information of the study. The first chapter presents the background of the research and the problem formulation by initiating the discussion about the problem of service quality and the importance of knowing and exploring the service quality in employee perspective. Further, the research purpose, research question, aimed thesis contributions, limitations and outline of research are described. In the second chapter, the previous research related to the topic are presented. Moreover, the relevant literature streams of main concepts such as service quality, employee perception and service quality, the measuring of service quality and service quality model are discussed. The third chapter provides a methodological selection for the study. To be precise, the explanations about research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, data collection method, analysis process, trustworthiness and limitations and ethical consideration are discussed and presented. In the fourth chapter, the empirical findings are presented. The findings are discussed and analysed in the fifth chapter with identified themes based on theoretical model and literature stream in order to answer the research question. Finally, the sixth chapter discusses the conclusion, contributions and suggestions for future research.

## 2 Literature Review

Since the study focuses on service quality as perceived by the employees in Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ), it is important to provide fundamental knowledge related to this study. This chapter consists of three main streams. The first section gives the understanding about the meaning and the nature of service quality. It further states the importance of the service quality and why employees' perception on service quality is essential. The second section includes the measurement of service quality and framework, SERVQUAL, which is considered as an appropriate instrument to help answering the research question. The last section presents additional relevant aspects of service quality that were emerged from employee's perception in this study.

### 2.1 Service Quality

#### 2.1.1 What is service quality?

Service quality, based on Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), is the ability of an organisation to meet or exceed customer expectation. It is the overall impression that customers have towards the performance of the service (Zeithaml, & Bitner 1996). In this case, service quality is defined based on the standards of the clients toward services that they are receiving. Thus, it has been argued that this is one of the reasons why in an ongoing globalizations and advancements in information technology since way back then, service providers have shifted focus on managing customer relationships and loyalty particularly on customers' satisfaction for success in providing all clients with the level of service they require (Dominic, Goh, Wong & Chen, 2010). As stated in the background of this study, services like public services creates a connection or a link between the customers and the serving organization, thus, the researchers of this study further argue that it depends on the service quality whether that connection will be strong or weak.

On the other hand, from the organization and employees' view, Grönroos (1988) points out that service quality is defined as the difference between delivered service quality from organisation and service performance that expected by employees. Therefore, service quality is conceptualised as the difference between expected and actual service performance (Kara, Lonial, Tarim & Zaim, 2005). In this case, employees of service-providing organization are highly regarded in service quality. Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2008) state that: "a complex combination of strategies is needed to ensure that service employees are willing and able to

deliver quality services and that they stay motivated to perform in customer-oriented, service-minded ways" (p.280). Hence, as this suggests, service quality can also be a result of a having a bunch of satisfied employees. Ye and Liang (2010) suggest that service quality and productivity can be obtained thru enhancing employees' satisfaction in the working environment.

### 2.1.2 Employees' perception and service quality

The following discussions present the arguments of why employee is important to the service delivery process. After reviewing the literature, the researchers of this thesis consider that the perceptions, role, and satisfaction of employees directly affect the quality of the service and how service is being served. Thus, it can be argued that the perception of the employees toward service quality is needed to be explored.

#### 2.1.2.1 Perception and role of employee in service quality

Previous studies have emphasized on the critical role of employees in the service process within the organisation. Hooper, Coughlan and Mullen (2013) point out in their study that employee is one of the most influential factors on service quality. In addition, Musaba, Musaba and Hoabeb (2014) have argued that employees as internal customers are always the first to get in contact with the clients and it is them who can build or break the reputation of the organisation. They maintain that understanding employee perceptions of service quality is relevant because their perception of the work environment determine what kind of service quality the organisation will offer to the customers. In other words, the perception of employees contributes to the delivery of high quality services (Reeves & Hoy, 1993). Thus, this is why it can be argued that exploring how employees perceive the services they deliver is critical.

Moreover, it cannot be denied that in order to achieve service quality, availability of high quality staff within the organisation is paramount. This is in agreement with Day (1999) who declares that delivering service quality is heavily dependent on the employees' competencies and skills. Supported by Elnagal and Imran (2014), employees are the most valuable assets for the organisation as they are invariably source of knowledge and abilities that cannot be imitated by the competitors. Employees become very important aspect in the organization and the success of any service organisation is dependent on how they have been engaged to the overall strategy of the organisation (Shah, 2011). Ariani (2015) agrees that employee is important to the service by maintaining that employees not only deliver and create services but also become part of the whole work process which improve the service quality.

Further, there are many compelling reasons why employees are critical to the success of an organization in providing service quality. De Chernatony (1999) charges that employees act as ambassadors and customers who encounter with them influences the impression they form about the organisation both in the private and public organisation. Wilson et al. (2008) agree with this assertion by stating that when employees provide the accurate service the customer's desires can

be met, the company gains a good reputation hence attracting more customers than the competitors.

There is also a correlation of all employees' behaviour to the overall customers' satisfaction (Kattara, Weheba & El-Said, 2008). They claim that employees' behaviours either negative or positive affects the satisfaction of customers when they come to purchase a product or request for a service from an organisation (Kattara, Weheba & El-Said, 2008). It can be said that customers form perceptions each time they are in contact with employees of the organisation (Wright, 2013). A good reputation is therefore built when customers have a satisfactory experience with the employees during the service-interaction in an organisation. Moreover, Shahani-Denning (2000) claims that employees especially the front-office staff provide useful information in terms of organizational initiatives that might impact customer satisfaction on the service.

#### 2.1.2.2 Employee satisfaction and service quality

Employee satisfaction can be perceived as a “positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences” (Islam & Siengthai, 2009, p.4). It has been described as a feeling which employees have towards their work (Ariani, 2015). It is also perceived as the engine which changes the internal working environment to the employee and ultimately improves service quality as expected by the customers (Piriyathanalai & Muenjohn, 2012). Hence, the satisfaction of the employee towards their job responsibility becomes critical towards the success of service organisations.

Employee satisfaction can also be considered to influence the quality of service delivery in organisations. Previous study indicate that “employee satisfaction is very important to enhance the quality of services that rendered to the customers in any given company, and is crucial to the firms' profitability” (Tahernejad, Ghorban & Tahernejad, 2013, p.21). Similarly, Yee, Yeung & Cheng (2008) assert that “employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to be more involved in their employing organisation and more dedicated to delivering services with a high level of quality” (p.653). Wyse (2013) agrees that satisfied employees help the organisation to produce satisfied customers. She maintains that satisfied employees are more likely to assist customers with a more pleasant behaviour and a high level of customer services which bring about a more satisfying experience. Thus, organisations' success depends on employees contribution in service delivery (Mayhew 2017). Conversely, low employee satisfaction and overall low employee morale can negatively affect company operations greatly as both claimed by Wyse (2013) and Mayhew (2017). This is because unsatisfied employees are less likely to assist the customers causing dissatisfied customers and bad impression about the organisation (Wyse, 2013).

Employee satisfaction can be affected with several factors and can be enhanced through training, motivation and rewards while customer satisfaction depends upon service quality, contentment

and admirable behaviours of employees (Aziz & Lodhi, 2015). Further, employee satisfaction can also be affected by employees' autonomy as Saragih (2011) argues that when employees enjoy freedom to determine their own efforts in service provision, they tend to be more satisfied on their jobs. Therefore, management of organisations should ensure that policies implemented should ultimately bring about employee satisfaction if high level service quality objectives are to be achieved, which can be possible through the support of management practices of the organisation (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998).

### 2.1.3 Service quality in Developing Countries' Public Sector

Public sectors hold an important role in shaping the future of any country as it provides framework to private sectors, individuals and the citizens (Shogren, 1993). However, Shah (2011) states that most of the developing countries continue to suffer from poor and dysfunctional systems of governance including weak delivery of important services. According to Kanatta (2014), this is because of the challenges facing public service delivery in the developing countries such as corruption, civil conflicts, scarcity of funds, limited skilled personnel, and low motivation of public sector staff. Because of these problems, he stated that "in most developing countries, excellent public service provision is more of a myth than a reality" (p.1).

As a developing country, Zambia also faces challenges in delivering its services to its citizens. In the past years, this African country implemented reforms to better public service deliveries such as; political reform, economic environment reforms and external interventions (Momba & Kalabula, 2007). These reforms are supposed to alleviate the status of poor public service delivery and promote development as the word "reform" suggests of improvement or amendment of what is unsatisfactory, wrong or corrupt (Innes, 2003). Another reform mentioned by Momba and Kalabula (2007) is the attempt of Zambia government in strengthening the state's capability through administrative reforms with emphasis on the decentralization of structures and services in connection with the growing demands of efficient services delivery. However, Mulimbika, De Waal and Goedegebuure (2015) said that despite of implementing reforms to better enhance the effectiveness of public sector and improve service delivery to Zambian people, public services remain unsatisfactory. They further state that "government institutions has continued to fail in either quantity or quality of services as expected by tax payers" (p.3).

### 2.1.4 Service quality and Examinations Council of Zambia

In spite of continued bemoan to public services as mentioned previously, the Zambia government remain focused to its goal of providing better services to its citizen. The government undertook another attempt on human management reforms for the public service to promote effective, efficient, and quality service delivery to support national development (Times of Zambia, 2015). One of the sectors that plays a vital role in Zambia is the ECZ (see for more information of ECZ in Appendix A) under the Ministry of General Education (MOGE). As mentioned in the

introduction chapter of this research, this organisation has specific obligations in line with national policies to undertake fully fledged programmes in the ministry to make public administration meet overwhelming political, social and societal demands. In the same chapter of the study, the researchers of this study also elaborated that ECZ has applied decentralization in the past three years by creating service centres in different areas in Zambia to deliver services fast and efficient.

Writing for the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), Bossuyt and Gould (2000) argue that decentralisation creates space for the people to effectively participate in decision making processes resulting to greater possibility in achieving development. Oates (1972) states that local decentralization results to efficiency or even more efficient when it comes to providing certain public services compared to a centralized system. Though ECZ was able to realize decentralization, during the conduct of this study, there is still no research discussing the result of this step and its impact in service quality. Thus, perceptions of the ECZ employees are essential in visualizing service quality.

## 2.2 Measuring Service Quality

According to Baharun, Feiz, & Ghotbabadi (2012), measuring service quality can greatly enable managers and higher regulating bodies of organisations to recognize different challenges and improve the competence of quality of services delivery. Among the different models used in measuring service quality that has been reviewed (see Appendix B; Service Quality Measurement Models), this study uses SERVQUAL model as a theoretical framework to explore service quality perception of employees in ECZ.

### 2.2.1 SERVQUAL Model

The SERVQUAL model was proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985; 1988). According to this model, service quality is the difference between the expected level of service and customer perceptions of the level received (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). Initially, they proposed Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence, Access, Courtesy, Communication, Credibility, Security, Understanding/Knowing the customer, and Tangibles as ten components of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). In order to develop the SERVQUAL model, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) formulated a considerable set of questions for rating a service against the ten basic components of service quality to determine the gap in customer satisfaction. They hold that satisfactory service quality is less when the services experienced by the customer is less than the expected service.

After analysing the ten basic components, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry reduced them to five dimensions namely Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. They argued that, irrespective of the service type, customers gauge service quality using the same

generic criteria, which can be grouped into five dimensions as described above (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). Moreso, “the dimensions of service quality are correlated, and they form the overall service quality perception” (Moisescu & Gica, 2013, p.6).

In further reviews, however, SERVQUAL model has been criticized in both theory and operation. The fact that the model has its roots in disconfirmation paradigm (comparison between expectation and experience) and not attitudinal paradigm (psychological drivers of strong consumer-brand relationships, Sreejesh 2014), Buttle (1996) argues that it does not rely on renowned economic, statistics and psychology concepts to provide standardized outcomes. Furthermore, the model is weak as it focuses mainly on the service delivery process and not the outcome of the service encounter with the service organization (Buttle, 1996). The predictive power of the instruments and validity of the five dimensions are argued to be inconsistent in determining the outcome of different service quality studies (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Dabholkar, Shepherd & Thorpe, 2000).

### 2.2.2 SERVQUAL as Theoretical Framework

Despite the criticisms of the model as mentioned above, The SERVQUAL model provides a general understanding of the service quality dimensions which are commonly used, widely accepted and applicable in different industry settings (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). Greater support of the model is reported by Brady and Cronin (2001) who suggest that SERVQUAL model appears to be distinct from other instruments because it uses terms that describe one or more dimensions of a quality service encounter. This qualitative study will unveil distinct perspectives on service delivery and crucial dimensions of service quality from an employee’s standpoint. Given that the SERVQUAL can be modified to specific research needs (Ramseook-Munhurrun, Lukea-Bhiwajee & Naidoo, 2010), the questions in this study have been constructed to assist the employees to provide the overall background to the delivery processes at the services centre of ECZ at large.

In addition, the model has been supported by many researchers as a very good and practical measurement tool to understanding customers expectations to improve the service delivery process (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Buttle, 1996). Further, the SERVQUAL has been used to assess service quality in a wide range of contexts including stock brokerage offices (Meybodi, 2012), airline (Wu & Cheng, 2013), banks (Kangis & Passa, 1997), agribusiness (Gunderson, Gray & Akridge, 2009), universities (Chong & Ahmed, 2011) and police services (Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer & Shiu, 2006). Moreover, studies also show that it has been used to explore the employees’ perception on service quality; the study of employees’ perspectives of service quality in hotels (Al-Ababneh, 2016) and the study of measuring service quality: perception of employees in call center (Ramseook-Munhurrun, Naidoo & Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010). Further, the model is applicable with qualitative approach as the study of Järvinen and Wiik (2006) and Karnstedt and Winter (2015) applied SERVQUAL using this method.

Considering the purpose of this study and based on the aforementioned studies which show justification for the model choice in the literatures of service quality, the SERVQUAL model has been considered as an appropriate framework that will help answer the research questions on how service quality is perceived by the employees of ECZ.

## 2.2.3 Dimension of SERVQUAL model

### 2.2.3.1 Tangibles

Tangibles according to Parasuraman, Zeithml, and Berry (1988) refer to the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel. Scholars consider tangibles like the working environment where service delivery takes place, as fundamental factors which assist service providers in creating a favourable customer impression as it reduces perceive risks (Bateson, 1985). Hanaysha (2016) emphasises that organisations must exert effort in making their physical environment attractive to build strong impression in agreement to the claim of Alsaqre (2011) that tangibles create direct influence on how clients perceive service quality. According to Morgan (2015), working environment is the physical workspace which is described as the one an employee can see, touch, taste, and smell. He declares that employee well-being is strongly correlated to employee productivity and performance which according to BizFilings (2017), can be done by the use of some sort of equipments and facilities that employees need to do their job. This is congruent with Gifford (2012) who argues that the office set up along with the furnitures and office accessories used, can dictate the productivity of the entire team in an organization. Baron and Greenberg (2003) also note that employees desire working in conditions that promote comfort and convenience. They add that absence of comfort to the working environment impacts negatively to employees.

Moreover, modern based technology equipment also make hard and time-cosuming work easy adding ease to both customers and employees (Ramney, 2012) signifying improvement to the organization (Lehtinen & Poblete, 2010). Parasuraman, Zeithml, and Berry (1988), on the other hand, also mentioned that the appearance of the personnel is critical in building long term customer impression. It is apparent that the physical appearance of the person gives the first impression when people interact with each other. According to Lee, Chen, Yu & Tsui (2012), highly attractive service providers significantly enhance perceived service quality to the customers.

### 2.2.3.2 Reliability

Parasuraman, Zeithml, and Berry (1998) regard reliability as the ability of the service provider to performs the promised service dependably and accurately to the customer. They add that it concerns dealing with every service problems from the customers at the promised time, performing the required services right from the onset, and implementing error free measures. Yang and Fang (2004) emphasise the importance of reliability in maintaining accurate records,

billing, orders and many other related services in the banking sector. De Chernatony (1999) maintains that trust and confidence which leads to the establishment of customer relationship is built if service employees provide accurate services. In view of this, Egeland (2017) argues that customers expect accuracy from the employees during service interactions and if they are not delivered as expected, then they are inaccurate. He adds that managers including everyone in the organization, expects accuracy from every individuals in the service delivery chain to produce accurate services. As a dimension of service quality, reliability therefore serves as an important factor in promoting loyalty to customers by providing accurate services.

#### 2.2.3.3 Responsiveness

Defined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988), responsiveness refers to willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Promptness refers to the readiness of employee to provide service in timely manner. (Keh, Ren, Hill and Li, 2013). Wang (2015), and Tom and Lucey (1995) point out that if the waiting time that the customer experience is shorter than expected, the customer will have higher satisfaction. Bielen and Demoulin (2007) agrees that consumer waiting time causes negative influence on consumer service perception. They added that if the waiting time is too long, the service companies might lose transaction as consumer consider waiting time as a sacrifice to get the service. Moreover, Gladin (2003) argues that providing the service without promptness causes delays which make customers unhappy. Dube-Riou, Schmitt and Leclerc (1989), also claim that this causes negative feelings such as irritating, annoying and frustrating. Thus, the organization should find the way to deal with the waiting time of the customer as it influences the service quality.

On the other hand, Vasella (2015) argues that by understanding the need of the customers, the organization will be able to deliver the service better to align with those needs. In agreement with this concept, Wong and Sohal (2003) point out that to understand customer's specific needs at heart provides a strong signal in the service quality and performance of the service delivered towards customer. Understanding clients can be argued to trigger the willingness of employees to help. According to Liu, Yan, Phau, Perez and Teah, (2016) willingness to help is the "the extent to which front-line staff members provide help to the customer and show willingness to serve" (p.468). Moreover, Keh et al. (2013) point out that the employee should not be too busy to respond to the request from the customer. Added by the same authors, willingness to help is not only the availability of the employees to help the customer but they also need to have motivational aspect of their behavior that links to intrinsic motivation. In other words, an act of help with deep emotions. Thus, willingness of the employee to spend extra time and effort helping the customer is a cause of delight (Liu et al., 2016).

#### 2.2.3.4 Assurance

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1998), assurance consists of competence, courtesy and credibility of the employees as well as their ability to inspire trust and confidence to

the customers. Auka, Bosire and Matern (2013) argue that this dimension represents the extent to which a consumer gain trust from a provider and the prospects of having confidence with the organisation to provide the requested service securely and competently. Moreover, the impact of assurance in fostering customer loyalty remains important (Timney, 2017) which can be achieved even during the first customer contact to the employees by showing courtesy, friendliness, and honesty (Steenkamp 2015). However, trust and confidence of customers may also be lost during the first customer contact by means of misinformation as Business Ethics Briefing (2014) claims that giving wrong information can lead to serious effect on the organisation's reputation. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a need for service providers to ensure correct information dissemination to build trust with the customers. Further, organisations need to communicate their expertise and competencies repeatedly before they do the work in order to establish customer relationship (Arlen, 2008). Hill and Lineback (2011) argue that this can be done through collective work efforts of varied skills, knowledge, and concentration of the employees. Through this, as claimed by Dixon, Freeman and Toman (2010), customers slowly gain trust and confidence towards the organization.

#### 2.2.3.5 Empathy

This dimension represents the care and personalised attention the service organisation provides to its customers (Parasuraman, Zeithml & Berry, 1988). Auka, Bosire and Matern (2013) argue that empathy is reflected in the organization's ability to facilitate access, communication and understanding of the customer. Thus, empathy is an act which should give the customer a great satisfying experience as they seek and request the service from the provider (Fluss, 2016).

On the other hand, Keogh (2011) clarifies that individualized services concern provision of equal access and opportunity to service delivery by establishing flexible alternatives to customers that do not fit into standardized structures. This is further agreed by Kong and Jogaratnam (2007) who state that personalization of employees' services is significant predictor of customer satisfaction. Service delivery should then be not in any way inconvenience the customers to strongly influence the degree of customer satisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithml & Berry, 1988). According to Auka, Bosire and Matern (2013), empathy is evaluated on the following based on the individualised attention, convenient operating hours, understanding of the staff, and the knowledge the employees have about the needs of the customers. When employees express these, positive and satisfied customers are generated (Ariani, 2015).

Contrary, negative and discriminatory practices affect the organisations within the locality it serves (Benjamin, 2017). Worse still, discrimination is detrimental to the organization if it is a front office personnel representing the public sector (Finn, 2017). Thus, in today's competitive world when the general perceptions of service quality are declining, "knowledge of the factors that influence customer evaluations in service encounters is therefore critical" (Bitner, 1990, p.69).

## 2.3 Additional Dimension

After the research in literature and conducting interviews, five additional influencing dimensions have been identified. These need to be considered as separate additional dimensions as neither of them fit in the best knowledge of the researchers to any of the existing SERVQUAL dimensions. Therefore, it is necessary to explore literatures on Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Employees Empowerment, Convenience, and Manpower.

### 2.3.1 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

The European Medicines Agency (2002), define Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) as a set of written and detailed instructions that document a routine or repetitive activity followed by an organization to achieve uniformity of the performance of a specific function. In this regard, SOP makes service provision within the organisation done consistently while maintaining safety, efficiency and quality across departments (Johnson, 2017). It also helps cultivate transparent functions; implement error prevention measures and facilitate corrective actions and transfer knowledge and skill (Amare, 2012). The effectiveness of SOP relies also with the employees teamwork as it promotes collaboration among the members of the organisation in reaching common goals (Heathfield 2017). However, with lack of coordination, teamwork is impossible since it results to unproductivity and delayed of tasks (Bass 2017). Moreover, Smith (2017) also states that communication affects SOP. She adds that though communication is hard to implement, once smoothly implemented, can lead to service provision's productivity. Thus, companies are argued to encourage teamwork since it is a common problem among companies as Lencioni (2003) claims. He added that very few companies make teamwork a reality.

On the other hand, many organisations in today's era, consider external outsourcing as part of their SOP. This is done to ensure that their authenticity and quality standards are upheld in the products and services the organisation delivers to its customer base. "The use of outsourcing is already widespread – and expected to grow rapidly" (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007, p.46) in the coming years. Outsourcing represents a strategy by which an organization contracts out major functions to specialized and efficient service providers (Pine, 2017). For public organisation, the significant benefits are that outsourcing intensifies their corporate focus on core competencies while allowing providers carry out functions in which they have proven in-depth capabilities (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). Pine (2017) argues that not all outsourcing are successful and thus recommends that careful consideration should be dealt before implementation. In addition, it is imperative for both the service provider and contractor to establish unequivocal milestones, at which point certain clear goals are to have been achieved during outsourcing (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

### 2.3.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Though there is no definite definition of what Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is, it is good to consider that ICT includes all uses of digital technology that exist to help individuals, businesses and organisations use information (Riley, 2015). In today's world, the growth of the internet, mobiles and communication technology has brought about enormous opportunities for service organisations. Further, continuous technological developments and adoption in the service industry has been seen to create more secure methods for delivering the services most needed by customers such as online customer services (Muchiru, 2014). Technology is no longer being regarded as an enabler but as a business driver (Ankrah, 2012) in providing the expected service quality to the customers. As customers are demanding for quicker delivery of an individualised services (Muchiru, 2014), organisations are striving hard to increase transparency and accountability by integrating technology in the service processes since technology enhances service delivery performances of employees and the organization (Kandampully, 2013).

Technology has also facilitated sustained communication between an organisation and its customers which creates a good customers service. This has been observed by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012) who states that today's customers can access services anytime, anyplace and using whatever means of communications they prefer through modern technology. It can be said that technology has enabled organisations to endeavour to meet the expressed needs of the customer now and for the future in today's competitive marketplace. As with most other service organisations, Ankrah (2012) concludes that such organisations are in a haste to invest in technology because they intend to "control costs, attract new customers, and meet the convenience and technical innovation expectations of their existing customers" (p.54). According to Republic of Kenya (2001), investing in technologies to deliver services should be prioritized. Therefore, organisations which have invested in technology, have a higher probability of achieving service quality which leads to growth in their customer base and ultimately retains customer loyalty.

Technology including modern electronic machines like ATM, which is a technology-based self-service, is perceived as a key improvement in providing a better service quality (Lehtinen & Poblete, 2010). The main reason of implementing technology-based self-service is to provide faster service delivery which help increase service quality (Lehtinen & Poblete, 2010). Ankrah (2012) agrees that technology is used to provide automation process which deliver ease and efficiency to the customers. Schneider, Parkington and Buxton (1980) confirm that a well service machine has a positive effect to customer perception in service quality. Moreover, technology also help consumers to access the service whenever and wherever they want through different channel. "Web 2.0 and online social networks has enables quick, direct and cost effective method to engage with their citizens" (PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012, p.11). These channel options in the service gives customer flexibility on how, when and where their access the service which result in customer satisfaction (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012).

### 2.3.3 Employee Empowerment

Elnagal and Imran (2014) acknowledge that employees are the repository of knowledge, skills and abilities that can barely be imitated. For leading organisations, employees are an important for the business success. Employee empowerment refers to employees being more proactive and self-sufficient in assisting an organization to achieve its goals (Demirci & Erbas, 2010). According to Elnaga and Imran (2014), employee empowerment is considered to be a new way of managing people and entails involving people responsible for the entire work process. Thus promoting sense of belongingness to every member of the workforce (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2013) allowing employees to maximize their contributions to the team at the highest levels possible (Kanter 2010). Elnaga and Imran (2014), add that empowerment is critical because service quality starts from the same people who know the business process best in the organisation. Empowerment is believed to facilitate self-management of the organization which gives the employees autonomy to succeed in the knowledge economy (Suess, 2015). For organisations, empowerment strategies have been proven to reduce staff turnover, improve productivity and efficiency, retain customers at a higher rate, and make more profits (Engagement Multiplier, 2016). Under this backdrop, it can be said that employee empowerment leads to people having the required confidence to work more efficiently and effectively. Moreso, “allowing people to possess independence and feedback within the organization is what makes the empowerment process successful” (Elnaga & Imran, 2014, p.14). Empowerment is thus a concept which improves the human element to achieve high degrees of cooperation, team spirit, self-confidence, innovation, independent thinking and entrepreneurship (Elnaga & Imran, 2014).

The employees also feel empowered if they are motivated by the employer through human resource (HR) management. Human Resource Excellence (2017), states the importance of HR in an organisation as it is responsible in building a good team. BBC (2014) further explains that HR is responsible for identifying employees’ needs such as trainings, welfare and motivation. Moreover, Heathfield (2017) argues that every person is motivated and this is influenced by biological, intellectual, social and emotional factors. Mitchell (1982) states that motivation is a form of psychological process which trigger individuals to pursue achieving goals. Elnaga and Imran (2014) add that motivation bring many positives results as motivated employees feel confident in their capabilities, identify their obligations and are engaged to apply themselves to the wellbeing of the organization. Relatedly, financial incentives which come along with a motivation system may help employees acquire the skills required to produce quality work for the organisation (Bonner & Sprinkle, 2002). Therefore, positive relationship between financial incentives and performance is established (Jenkins, Mitra, Gupta, and Shaw, 1998). Conversely, lack of motivation leads to dissatisfied employees as it drains away their personal pride, self-confidence and energy in producing quality work (Elnagal & Imran, 2014). Moreover, training also plays a role in motivating employees. Frost (2017) emphasises that training benefits the whole organisation as it strengthens the skills of the employees, covers weaknesses of the organisation, and promotes better job performance to its workforce. Further, in a study conducted

by Zumrah (2014) it was found that employees apply the knowledge and skills they learn from training in their workplace making them more competitive in service quality delivery.

Employees who feel empowered at work are more expected to show positive feedbacks to their duties and jobs according to proponents of empowerment (Liden, Wayne & Sparrowe, 2000; Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997). This was agreed by Anaza, Rutherford, and Widdows (2012), as they said that building a better professional employee and providing better services require the implementation of empowered workforce. Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) mentioned that empowering employees brings positive impact to their level of attachment towards their employer. The more employees feel empowered, the more it is harder for them to leave the organization. Employees' attachments to their firm is identified as organizational identification, a state when employees enjoy central, lasting, and unique belief systems with their work place (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

To sum up, every employee as a social being has different needs and expectations in both their work and life. The importance of having a highly motivated, innovative and dedicated human resource should not be underestimated at the workplace. For public service organisations, empowering people involves reengineering the processes and systems within which employees operate (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). Therefore, "both employee and employer should try to generate a working condition that employees will work in a happy, motivated and productive atmosphere to reach the certain goals" (Elnaga & Imran, 2014, p.22). If empowerment is done correctly, Demirci and Erbas (2010) maintain by concluding that it changes the employees' attitude by making them proactive, to collaborate with others and willing to accept greater responsibilities in the work environment.

### 2.3.4 Convenience

According to Oxford English Dictionaries (2017), convenience has been defined as the state of being able to proceed with something without difficulty, the quality of being useful, easy, or suitable for someone, and anything that contributes to an easy and effortless way of life. Convenience is considered as an important aspect in service marketing field.

Being a service provider, location is considered as another vital aspects in providing the service. According to Berry, Seiders and Grewal (2002), the speed and ease that customer are able to access the service influence the willingness of the customer to go to the service facility. They added that a service provider requires customer's participation so it is essential to bring service to customer not the other way round. Moreover, Jones, Mothersbaugh and Beatty (2003), argue that location is the point of contact where customers can access the services in order to complete the service process so location of the service should be a place where it minimizes the travel cost to the consumers. They explain further that this travel cost refers to the cost occurring from the distance that consumer travel between his/her home or office and the service providers. In

addition, Harris, Goudge, Ataguba, McIntyre, Nxumalo, Jikwana and Chersich (2011) mentioned that everyone in the society should have a right to access the public service so that those who need the service are able to access it no matter who they are, where they are or their ability to pay. Within the same concept, Fredriksson (2017) argues that services will not be used if there is a large distance (between service providers and customers). This has been confirmed by the study of Kondylis and Manacorda (2012) which shows that distance to the school affects schools attendance in Tanzania. In addition, Hamel (2017) argues that location of a service is important in a way that if the business is located in the prime area it is more likely to attract the customers than a business located in a remote area. Based on the discussion above, location or distance of the service facility considered as important aspect under the convenience concept.

### 2.3.5 Manpower

Manpower becomes very important in connecting the organisation with the customer base through the provision of quality services. According to Oxford English Dictionaries (2017), manpower is the number of people working or available for work or service. Adequate manpower is necessary to enhance expected performance and productivity (Thibodeaux, 2017). Ashiagbor (2014) adds that committed workforce is essential to achieve accuracy of services in the organisation. As Harris (2007) claims, the staff actions reinforce the unique service offering of the organisation to the customer. It is therefore convincingly trusted that manpower is proportional to productivity. This is because more people are available to work, the faster projects can be completed or the more projects a company can take on (Thibodeaux, 2017). Based on this fact, it can be argued that lack of manpower prevents businesses from completing tasks as it translates into a reduction in productivity, revenue and profits (Thibodeaux, 2017). Even worse, lack of adequate manpower may lead to people working long hours which may result in employees developing a variety of health problems such as stress which affects mental abilities leading to unsatisfactory job outcome (Leviticus, 2017). Ultimately, employees may become dissatisfied and results in a decline in performance for the organisation (Piriyathanalai & Muenjohn, 2012). This is in agreement with Sara (2015) who argues that inadequate manpower compromises and decelerates the potential growth of service quality (Sara, 2015). Moreso, a shortage of manpower leads to delays in service delivery and employees feel pressured to increase efficiency (Miffling & Taylor, 2007).

It can therefore be argued that lack of manpower results to multitasking of employees which Douglas, Raban, Walter and Westbrook (2017) claim to cause detrimental effects on the job performance. Consequently, it compromises the service quality the organization renders to the customers. It is therefore important for employers to have enough workforce to ensure service quality delivery.

## 3 Methodology

This chapter describes and assesses the methodological background of the study which consists of research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, data collection method, data processing, trustworthiness, limitations and ethical considerations. Moreover, it describes the details concerning the method choice that was adopted and how this approach enable the research to explore the research problem

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

Research Philosophy is considered a vital part of the research as it helps the researchers to have a clearer view on the design and evaluation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). It enables the researchers to have a clear sense of the research method and helps clarify the research design, not only what data should be collected but also how data should be gathered and interpreted (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In this regard, the researchers of this study present the research philosophy below that will help shape and guide the study in order to answer the research questions.

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and existence which consists of four main views namely; realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Considering the ontology point of view, the researchers take a relativism view. This is because the researchers believe that different people have different experiences and different views on a specific phenomenon. This is in line with what Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) describes on the concept of relativism. Moreover, the thesis aims at exploring the employees' perception which the researchers believe that they will vary depending on individual and context. In agreement with this context, Collins (1983 cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.132) states that relativists assume that "what counts for the truth can vary from place to place and from time to time" which matches with this study.

Epistemology concerns the theory of knowledge which enable the researchers to understand the nature of the world which consist of two main views in the social science research namely; positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Positivism emphasizes that the "social world exists externally and that its properties can be measured through objective methods" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.135). On the other hand, social constructionism value the different views and meanings that people have from their experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). With regards to epistemology, the

researchers of this thesis take the social constructionist view as the purpose of the thesis is to understand the perception of employees' towards service quality in a public organization. The study mainly focuses on what individuals or a group of people think and feel about the service quality situation in the organisation. Moreover, the researchers are interested in understanding the real-life context of the phenomenon from people rather than generalising the findings.

## 3.2 Research Approach

### Abductive Approach

The extent to which the researchers are clear with the use of theory in the research will clarify the research design of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There are two perspectives that concern the relationship between theory and research which are deductive and inductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Deductive approach occurs when the conclusion is derived from the existing theories and the data collection is used to test that theory while inductive approach occurs when the result of the analysis will help generate or formulate the theory and framework (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

As the aim of the study is to examine the perception of employees towards service quality in a specific public organization, researchers believe that using the combination of both inductive and deductive approach known as "abductive" approach would be appropriate approach to carry out the research. Considering the nature of the study, the researchers chose to base the research on existing theories related to service quality and employees' perception which, in our view, implies that the study adopts a deductive approach. However, this research does not aim at testing theory with hypothesis. Moreover, as there is limited empirical evidence on employee's perception on service quality (Al-Ababneh, 2016), most of the literature on the service quality are mainly focusing on the customers. Therefore, the researchers are open to gain new insights from the data collection that would be beneficial to the existing theories although it may or may not align with the existing framework. This implies that an inductive approach will be also utilized in the study. By applying both inductive and deductive approaches, the researchers will be able to overcome the weakness of each approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

## 3.3 Research Strategy

### Qualitative Research Strategy

The research strategy is depending on the "connection between theory and research and the epistemological considerations, and ontological considerations" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.26). The research strategy is helpful for the researchers to classify and structure the different methods that will be used in the study by distinguishing between the qualitative and quantitative (Bryman

& Bell, 2011). Considering the overall purpose of the study, the theory and research philosophy, this study takes a qualitative approach.

As one of the major challenges in an organization is the issue of service quality (Al-Ababneh, 2016), the purpose of this study is to explore an in-depth understanding of the employees' perceptions on service quality in public sector. This will be achieved by revealing the service quality meaning influenced by the interpretation of each employee. The employee's perception of service quality in an organization is considered important as it contribute towards the overall business success (Vella, Gountas & Walker, 2009). By understanding their perceptions, it will be beneficial to an organization in terms of planning for an effective marketing procedure which will lead to employee satisfaction and result in better service performance to the customers (Bansal, Mendelson & Sharma, 2001).

Moreover, the empirical evidence on employees perceptions of service quality is limited in the field (Al-Ababneh, 2016). This shows that qualitative approach is an appropriate research strategy which enables the researchers to answer the research questions. Accordingly, the study aims to learn more about the perceptions of the employees towards service quality, the influencing dimensions of the service quality among the employees and reasons behind it. A qualitative research strategy emphasises an in-depth understanding and descriptive term rather than quantification in the analysis of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and this matches with our study. Futhermore, the qualitative research is used to examine the inquiry of the social phenomena, for example, "how people experience aspects of their lives, how individuals and/or group behave and how organization function" (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa & Varpio, 2015, p.1). In order to understand the phenomenon, the context should be acknowledged by "examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.386). The data collected will disclose the employees' perceptions towards the service quality in the public sector and also reveal how they value the influencing dimensions and what are the reasons for it. Interestingly, this study takes an in-depth understanding of the dimensions leading to service quality which will help enrich the knowledge in this field. As argued earlier in section 1.2, most of the studies which focused on service quality used quantitative data and hypothesis testing. Additionally, an exploratory approach under qualitative study is considered valuable to gain a deeper understanding of the problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

## 3.4 Data Collection Method

### 3.4.1 Qualitative Interview

Interview can be categorised into three main types which are structured interview, unstructured interview and semi-structured interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Structured interview is commonly used in quantitative method as it requires a specified

set of research questions that need to be investigated by using standardized questionnaire (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In comparison, qualitative interview which refers to unstructured interview and semi-structured interview are more interested in the interviewee's point of view, more flexible, responses to the direction that the interviewees take in the interview and they provide rich detailed answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, qualitative interview enables the researchers to collect the contextual data and to learn about the unexplored phenomena (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Since the main focus of the study is on the employees' perceptions of service quality in a public organisation, a suitable method is to provide an in-depth exploration on the employee's opinions in order to understand how they think about the service quality. Thus, the primary source of the data of this study are the employees. In line with the purpose of the research which attempts to explore the employee's perception of service quality at the ECZ service centre, a semi-structured interview was selected as an appropriate data collection method. Indeed, this approach gave the researchers a possibility to gain an understanding from the employee's point of view towards the service quality in an organisation. By using semi-structured interview, the researchers are able to ask the interviewees using the interview guide which include a list of key questions related to the topic of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). This approach ensures that the interview is going to cover the main topic and specific issues will be addressed. However, the interviewers are able to ask additional questions considered to be useful during the interview in order to gain deeper insights into the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This is in line with the advantage of the interview technique as mentioned by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) that, a semi-structured interview technique provides a personal setting to the interviewees which offers an opportunity to obtain a deep contextual data and insight about the study. Other data collection methods such as focus groups and questionnaires were also considered. However those methods do not provide an in-depth information which required to answer the research question of the study. Thus, a semi-structured interview remain the appropriate data collection method.

Since the study is focusing at the ECZ Service Centres operating in Lusaka and Kitwe districts of Zambia, one of the researchers stays near the Lusaka Service Centre, a face-to-face semi-structured interview technique was selected as an appropriate data collection method for Lusaka Service Centre while a semi-structured telephone interview is used to collect the data from Kitwe Service Centre. For Kitwe Service Centre, it is more practical, applicable and cost-saving to use telephone interviewing as our research conducted with the organisation where the researchers and the respondents are located far from each other (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2011)

### 3.4.2 Sampling

By collecting the data from a sample, the researchers are allowed to make a statement about the population that the sample is drawn from, thus, the researchers are responsible for selecting the relevant setting (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Since the research purpose is to explore an in-depth understanding of employees' perceptions of service quality in public sector, the selection of the sampling is important in order to assure the insightful findings. In this study, purposive sampling was applied as a sampling technique since the researcher has a clear idea of the sample unit which is needed in order to support the purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In other words, this type of sampling technique applies the sampling of the study that the research will be conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The sample was focused on employees of ECZ, mainly members of staff who are working and involved with the service centre of ECZ. The rationale is that these participants are the ones who are providing the services, facing the customers and knowing the challenges in the delivery of service of the organisation. The views, opinions and experiences from employees in the course of performing their duties, will help the researchers to interpret and align different perspectives to suit the research purpose. The researchers ensure that the sample covers all the service processes in order to gain insights from a diverse sample which provides a broader picture of the processes and systems involved in service delivery.

Purposive sampling has been categorised under non-probability sampling design which cannot be generalised as the findings from the sample of this study does not represent all public organisations or can be claimed in a larger group (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, the researchers aim to build a great deal of data from the chosen sample which would contribute to research within the field of public service delivery.

### 3.4.3 Interview Conduction

Before conducting the interviews, emails were sent to ECZ employees who were involved in the service process to ask for voluntary cooperation in this study. After that, an appointment was made and the consent forms (see Appendix C) were presented and explained to the employees. Twenty employees (a total numbers of employees involving in service process of ECZ) were contacted in total, eight from Lusaka service centre, five from Kitwe service centre and seven employees from the head office who are involved in the service delivery process of the service centres. A total of 18 employees agreed to participate in the interview which gives this study 90% confidence response rate. The final list of participants is illustrated in Appendix D.

Interviews were conducted face to face in Lusaka Service Centre with one of the researchers while telephone interviews were used with employees from the Kitwe Service Centre. Another researcher participated in the interview via telephone call. Both researchers were present during the interviews. One researcher was conducting the interview while the other researcher was taking notes and recording the interview to make sure that the information is accurate (Bryman

& Bell, 2011). Moreover, recording the interviews helps researchers to identify the information that was shared by the respondents and which could be lost if a note was taken solely (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 participants conducted in English with the average duration of 30 minutes. An interview guide with predefined topics and questions (see Appendix E) were used to support the interview process (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The interview began with a general introduction in order to inform the purpose of our study to the interviewees. The interviewees were informed that their personal details will not be revealed to the people outside the project and the interview will be also be audio recorded. During the interview, the participants were asked to share their opinions about the general views that they have with the service quality in the service centre. Moreover, the interview questions related to major topics and service quality, were asked. The closing question included follow-up contacts (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Further, the questions that the researchers used were open-ended questions and the researchers adopted the laddering-up and down technique in order to gain significant insights into the topic (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008).

### 3.5 Data Analysis Process

The literature streams related to the service quality and employees' perception on service quality were reviewed. The SERVQUAL model and its dimensions was chosen as the theoretical framework that would help answer the research question as it is widely accepted in this field. By exploring the literature, guided questions for conducting the interviews was created. Those guided questions were linked with the SERVQUAL model and service quality context.

After the interview data were transcribed. The researchers started the analysis process by reviewing all the answers that were taken from the participants during the interviews. Following and adapting Bryan and Bell's (2011) coding process, empirical data were categorised, ranked and identified for data presentation and further analysis. However, the process in this research study was done a bit narrower in order to avoid the exceeding scope of the thesis.

First, all participants were assigned with the numbers from 1 to 18. All verbatims from the interview transcription of each participant were labeled as participant 1 (P1) to participant 18 (P18) to ensure the anonymity of participants and easy categorisation. After that, the researchers grouped all the transcription data from each participant based on each question asked. The most relevant answers from the transcription were highlighted to make it easier for the researchers to identify and rank the answers by giving the score to each answer. The ranking was used as a sorting technique to decide the relevancy of each answer which helped the researchers to analyse the data easily. A number ranking of 1 to 3 were used in this process where "3" means that answer is highly relevant to the question while "2" implies that the relevance of the answer is medium. The ranking "1" indicates that the answer has lowest relevancy to the answer. Both of

the researchers ranked the data separately in order to make sure that the data was highly relevant and no bias in data selection for analysis.

As the researchers of this study chose to adopt abductive approach to be the research approach, meaning that both inductive and deductive approaches were utilised in the analysis process. After the data had been grouped and ranked, the researchers then moved to identify the data with the existing theories in order to prepare for the analysis which implies a deductive approach. There were questions that were directly linked to the dimensions of the framework that the researchers used in the analysis which made the answers easy to identify. However, there were some questions that were open for ideas and not directly linked with the dimensions in the framework to deeply understand employees' perception. So, there was need to further identify the data to which dimension should they belong to based on the reviews of the related literature. The interpretation of the dimension was done by using the meaning of each dimension that was indicated in the previous literature in the framework. Moreover, there were some answers that did not match any existing dimension of the framework, and were identified by the researchers as new themes that were added in the analysis part. This implies an inductive approach. By doing it, the researchers used the guided questions such as "What is the item of data of data about?" or "What sort of answer to a question about topic does this item of data imply?" (Bryman & Bell, 2011. p.585). Some themes that were created but found not relevant to answer the research question has been left out.

By using the excel document in all of the analysis process including grouping, ranking and identifying, it was easy for the researchers to filter the results and it ensured that most of the relevant data were used in the analysis part. In this way, the researchers are able to come up with different themes, based on the dimensions of framework and related literature, to use in the data presentation and analysis.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and Limitations of the Research

The concept of reliability and validity are important to address in order to evaluate the quality of the research, however, the criteria is different between qualitative and quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to evaluate the quality of qualitative study, trustworthiness and authenticity have been proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as an accepted evaluation criteria among researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To begin with, the researchers assured that the findings were submitted to the participants to confirm that the researchers understood the social world correctly and that the research was carried out in a good practice in order to ensure the credibility of the findings from the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The researchers aim at providing a thick and rich description of the social world being studied which refers to transferability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to achieve this, the researchers provided in-depth information regarding perception of employees towards the service quality of public organisation in Zambia; the ECZ. This provides detailed information to the reader in order to have a clearer understanding of the study. Moreover, transferability examines the generalisation of the research. The researchers realised that by conducting an interview with a relatively small number of employees, though they are total numbers of employees involving in the service process of ECZ, it represents a small sample size which may not be able to be generalised to other countries or sectors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Although this study only focused on one public institution in Zambia; which is the ECZ, it represents a valid example that enables the research findings to provide valuable insight for further research.

The researchers ensured that all the complete records of the thesis process, for example, “problem formulation, selection of research participants, interview transcript, data analysis decision” are well kept and accessible (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.398) using Google Drive. Thus, this study is considered dependable.

To ensure the confirmability of the study, the researchers have to be aware that it is impossible for the business research to complete objectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In line with this concept, the researchers have shown that there were no personal values involved in all the research process and data were analysed according to the facts only. Moreover, the researchers strived to be reflexive to each other and make sure that the data were rechecked by both of the researchers during the analysis process and data analysis part in order to make sure that there is no bias.

In terms of authenticity, 18 out of the 20 employees working and involved in ECZ service delivery procedures responded to all of the questions in the interviews giving this study a 90% high response rate. This is higher than the enough or adequate study response rate suggested by different studies cited in Bright Ideas (2009), which is ranging from 25% to 75% response rate. Thus it can be argued that participants are fairly represented in viewpoints and gave insightful information directly to service delivery process which is related to the research purpose. Moreover, the study aim to explore the employees’ perception only not the perception from the customers or other stakeholders.

To conclude, the researchers believe that apart from the limitations that were mentioned above, the methodology choice was in line with the research purpose. In view of this, the methodology choice enabled the researchers to answer the research questions and gain a deeper understanding of the how employees perceived service quality and the dimensions affecting the service quality.

### 3.7 Ethical Consideration

In terms of ethical considerations, the ethical principle in business research can be categorised into four main areas which are “harm to participants”, “lack of informed consent”, “invasion of privacy and deception” (Diener & Crandall, 1978 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.128). To ensure the ethical consideration of the study, the consent form were shown to the participants before conducting the interview in order to make sure that they understood the objective of the study and agree with the details in the form. Moreover, the interview participants were informed that the interview will be audio recorded but their personal details will not be revealed to the people outside the project unless permitted if deemed necessary to ensure confidentiality. Moreover, respondents were also advised that they can withdraw from the study at any time during the conduct of this thesis.

## 4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted with employees who work and are involved at the ECZ Service Centres. The interviews were done in order to understand the employees' perception towards service quality. The findings were identified into ten themes related to the service quality. The first five themes were based on the original dimensions of SERVQUAL model. The last five themes were emerged and identified from the interview data. To illustrate findings, the researchers use direct quotes from interview that were given by the participants to support each themes as presented below.

### 4.1 Tangibles create impressions and provide comfort

The employees' perception on "Tangibles" reveals that tangibles are critical dimensions in service quality delivery. Many employees have described the importance of this dimension towards service quality as presented in the following:

Employees of the ECZ believe that customers judge the services from the "appearance of the building" where service interaction is done. This includes cleanliness and the overall outlook of the building. They added that if the environment and physical building appeared to be appealing, a good impression is likely to happen.

*"A client will judge you by your appearance in terms of what they can get out of you. So, if your buildings are in a dilapidated state, definitely it brings down the morale of the people visiting you. So, you have less clientele because of the nature of your building." - P9*

*"Now you have a beautiful environment, it gives a huge impression on the corporate image of an institution..." - P10*

Logically, the employees perceive that if the environment and physical building appeared to be unappealing, bad impression is created.

*"If the building is not looking in good shape, it may give a very bad impression on the people. Thinking, is this really where I can get a solution?" - P13*

The data also revealed that conducive environment which are the “work spaces” impact service quality delivery and benefit both customers and employees since they provide a free-flowing working environment.

*“Service delivery is provided in a conducive environment where the clients are free to walk in and ask questions pertaining to the services they require in that conducive environment.” - P15*

*“If people are working in a very conducive environment, then you will find that the way the service will be provided to people will be okay...” - P4*

*“Providing a service in a good environment, serene it will also motivate employees who are providing that service. A conducive environment is key in terms of quality provision.” - P15*

Moreover, enough parking space as part of employee’s motivation was also mentioned.

“Equipments and Facilities” are very important in providing service quality as revealed by the empirical data. By having enough, right, and up to date equipments, employees tend to deliver a better and fast service.

*“If you have all the physical facilities and equipment, you are able to attend to clients immediately. We don't have to send the client to deposit money at the bank. Everything is available here...If they need to photocopy documents, they don't need to go anywhere.” - P7*

Some of these facilities are modern electronic machines. The employees assert that having machines like Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) to withdraw money for payment, and photocopying machines for reproducing copies of documents, add more ease to the customers as they can do things under one roof. *“We have even introduced ATMs so that our customers are not troubled if they want to access as they are trying to pay for the services.” - P4.* Participant 6 added that *“if it is raining and the customers have no vehicles, then it is a problem. But now we have everything under one roof.”*

On the other hand, lack of facilities and unmaintained equipments hinder smooth flow of operations leading to service delays.

*“...If this equipment is not properly maintained or constantly give faults, then the period in which the service is supposed to be offered to a client will be increased and therefore it means that service delivery is being affected...” - P9*

*“If you don’t have the equipment, it means you will be attending to the issues in a manual way...So, the availability of equipment such as computers makes it easier...they are an important aspect of service delivery...” - P11*

The empirical data also showed powerful strengths of the service centre when it comes to facilities and equipments. Comparing to the past, respondents 2 and 7 mentioned that the *seats* provided to the clients enable the employees to talk with the them more closely in a conducive environment. This ensures that clients explain their problems more detailed and are able to wait for the response in a relaxing manner. It was also mentioned by participant 7 that there are *books* that keep the record of what has been worked on and what has not. Lastly, having a powerful *generator* in the service centre enable the employee to work smoothly even there is power outages (P17, P5).

On the other hand, the service centre was lacking *tables* where clients can fill-in forms, which are other physical facilities that can help improve the service (P1, P12). The other needs are *Suggestion box* for customers’ feedback (P3) and *Billboard* for information purposes (P1).

Aside from the above mentioned dimensions affecting tangibles, “appearance of the personnel” was also revealed to be important. The employees believe that the way employees present themselves, portrays a picture about the whole institution: *“The way people are dressed, it pictures the entire institution. Certain institutions have certain dress codes, to bring good a picture of the institution” - P7*. Moreover, it gives clients the confidence that the personnel can work on the requests since it also presents the personality of the employees. Employees add that appearance should be pleasing; *“Affects service quality...A presented appearance gives confidence to clients, you represent the institution. Appearance talks about your personality. Dress code should be pleasing.” - P18*.

## 4.2 Reliability ensures accuracy

Reliability seems to play an important role in the service quality since it was mentioned by almost all of the employees. An issue which was revealed from the respondents under this dimension is “accuracy”: *“I think that thorough in terms checking makes sure that whatever service we are providing is accurate.” - P17*. The data show that in order to assure accuracy, providing services to customers must adhere to the acceptable standards of the organization: *“For me, I think service quality is all about...making sure that the services that we offer to the public are at acceptable standards.” - P1*. And the outputs should undergo thorough check-ups before being released to the customers. *“As you are resolving the queries or processing data, there should be a number of people that should go through the same data before that information is given out to the clients. And that has proved to be very helpful for an institution like ECZ. We normally involve 2-3 people in making sure that they can check each other before any information is given out to the clients” - P4*.

Moreover, employees also believe that authentic outputs enhance customers' confidence and contribute in providing the service quality that the public is expecting; "...*the service you will get from us is authentic. The date stamp, the signature, the seal, everything that we do to offer the service, gives you the confidence that you have gotten a better service...*" - P9.

### 4.3 Responsiveness acknowledges and reacts to customers needs

One of the important dimensions that was revealed under this umbrella is "promptness". Employees think that by delivering the service at the right time with no delay, contributes greatly to service quality.

*"The service should be timely. That is, it should be provided within the expected time...Timely provision of the service is one of the key attributes of a good service. The main aim of our client is just to get their cases resolved within the stated time."* - P4

One dimension that affects promptness as data show, is *understanding the goals of clients*. The employees' claim that by doing this promptness can be attained. They understand that clients have deadlines to meet and so being prompt is treated to be a triggering dimension of quality service; *"I think service quality is all about being prompt in offering the service...Most of the people that come here, they have a deadline. So, we make sure that at least we are prompt so that at least we assist our clients to meet their goals and also their endeavors. So promptness is a very important aspect..."* - P1. Considering this, employees agree to serve customers as quick as possible to give way for customers to do their other tasks; *"They have a timeframe in mind... we have to provide a prompt service"*- P14. *"People are busy. You are not expecting someone to be here to just wait for you to provide the service. So, when people come, you attend to them as fast as possible..."*- P5. Part of understanding customers, is thinking about the distance they travel to be in the service centre: *"Yes, it is very important to be prompt. We have to take into consideration the distance that people are covering."* - P7.

As observed by the employees, customers become very satisfied if services are delivered in the quickest time possible: *"When some other documents that needs to be delivered quite right in the shortest possible time...It makes them (customers) very happy"* - P3 and thus, contributes to customers' satisfaction.

Moreover, employees believe that being prompt can exceed expectations of customers making them happier with the service interaction.

*"By sticking to the timeframe to tell the person to say this service give us 10 working days...We make sure that within 5 days, the query is processed and we call the client to come and collect the accumulated results."* - P18. Agreed by participant 12: *"I would say if we are able to deliver*

*our service in a manner that is going to make our customers exceed their expectations, that is customer satisfaction.”*

Additionally, employees perceive that promptness inspires confidence to the customers. They agree that it causes customers to have the confidence in the employees and organization itself: *“It is important to be prompt because it gives confidence to the people.” - P10.* This further results in customer satisfaction making them share their positive experiences to other people. *“So, if we are prompt in offering these services, our customers will be able to be satisfied and our clients will be able to spread the news on our behalf the ECZ.”- P12.*

On the other hand, the data shows that service delays are inevitable with the absence of promptness. The employees argue that services which take too long to be provided results in dissatisfaction of the clients: *“And also the timeframe in which these services are delivered is also cardinal because if service provision is taking long, then the clients will be dissatisfied.” - P12.*

Another dimension revealed in this study affecting responsiveness is the “willingness of the employees in helping the customers”. Employees claim that ECZ as a public organization aims to serve the public as part of its mandate and so, it is their duty to help the customers: *“We are a service provider. Our mandate is to serve the public.” - P7.* Aside from the mandate, the employees’ agree that as service providers, officers need to be present at all times when customers need them; *“...To be there available. When the client needs the services, officers need to be available to offer the service.” - P12.* Another employee supported this claim as he said that being available is an implication of a good service. *“A good service, I think maybe should be...readily available to the client, to the satisfaction of the clients” - P13.*

Apart from the aforementioned dimension, employees stated that “waiting time” plays a vital role in assuring responsiveness. They agree that the client should not be kept waiting for a long time when delivering the services.

*“The most important issue probably our clients are not happy is the issue of “come tomorrow”. I think the issue of come tomorrow should end in our system. The service should be provided there and then.” - P2.* Participant 12 added that *“service delivery needs to be like they say” Real time. But if service delivery would take a week, will take weeks, will take months before it is complete, then of course that will not very good for us as a council.” - P12*

Overall, based on these findings, responsiveness enhances quality provision as claimed by the employees as this helps recognize clients’ needs, resulting to employees appropriate actions towards their needs.

#### 4.4 Assurance creates attachment between employees, customers, and the organization

Assurance was found as an essential dimension in service quality as perceived by the employees. Most of them point out that employees especially those who are serving as frontline officers should have enough “knowledge” about the services being offered in the institution in order to provide quality service to customers and satisfy them. They agree that by giving enough information, customers will be well informed about the procedures and will avoid going back all the time to ECZ.

*“...Officers at the front office should have the right information to give to the clients so that client don't continue coming day after day” - P8. “Making sure that we give clients the correct information as they come. So they are able to rely on that.”- P5. “we need to be knowledgeable as ECZ staff. We need to be knowledgeable about all the processes in the institution so that we can explain all the services that are provided by ECZ to our clients.- P7. “if an explanation is offered, then the client will be able to understand what is required with that service provision”- P12.*

On the other hand, employees also believe that misinforming customers about the whole procedures in acquiring services at ECZ leaves unsatisfying impression and creates confusion in the minds of customers. Thus, leading customers to coming back again to access the same service.

*“If our customers come to us, and we are not able to explain to them exactly what is involved in our service provision, then they would go back with a different impression...So, I think from my general impression, I think most of the clients come back to us dissatisfied because maybe people at the front are not able to explain properly or correctly how the service processes are at the council.” - P12. “If you not knowledgeable, you find there are a lot of gaps that are left when a client comes through.”- P7*

Moreover, “*quality assurance process*” has been found to be essential in customer satisfaction and service quality as revealed by the interviews. The employees state that this process guarantees that customers receive the correct services making them confident about what they are getting from the ECZ.

*“We have quality assurance process in place. Before we release a product or service to our customers, it goes through quality assurance process or that is the checking process. And each checking process where an officer checks, they have to endorse that they have done their part. So, the quality assurance process ensures that at the end, what we are delivering to the client is an accurate one.” - P14*

*“...There are many people involved in resolving queries, it enhances security the way data should be handled. At the end of the day, the client should be confident of what they are getting from the officers.” - P4*

It was also revealed that “character” like friendliness (P1), honesty (P6), and politeness (P7) contribute to service quality.

Another aspect arising from the data that is considered to be affecting service quality is the “qualification of the employees” themselves. Participant 13 argues that it is essential for the employees to possess academic qualifications, skills and knowhow in the first place.

*“I will look first at the academic qualifications. The employee should be highly qualified to provide such services for the ECZ...People should be qualified to conduct the services. The employees should have all the skills skills and the knowhow needed.” - P3*

Additionally, “affecting customers perception” based on their previous experiences is a challenge but was found tested and proven by another participant to be essential in providing service quality. This participant claims that some customers have already fallen out of trust to public services, but by proving the customers’ negative perception about public services wrong, employees can make customers happy.

*“I think some of them (customers) don't believe you when you tell them. Sometimes they even say ‘we know how government operates...we will never be called’. But when you call them, they will come back smiling and say ‘Oh, I received the call that my certificate is done’. They go back very happy.” - P7*

#### 4.5 Empathy makes customers feel equal and valued

This category reveals how employees perceive empathy as one of important dimensions affecting service quality provision. Moreover, this also reveals practices of employees on customers’ treatment and their response to different issues of the customers.

Researchers of this study found that many respondents expressed that “equality” should be a concern while delivering services to the customers. Regardless of the background, colour, and or societal status of the customers, employees of ECZ believe that everyone should be treated equally on a ‘first come first serve’ basis where discrimination is not tolerated and every query is treated as important.

*“We treat all the customers equally. We receive a lot of people and different types of people; government officials, people from parliament, people from the community. When they come, we don't look at the individual, we look at the queries which they bring because we believe every*

*query is very important because we have the service with us. We are here to serve the public.” - P8*

Although, everyone is treated equally, this study found out that “individualized attention” are applied to customers in some cases that require humane consideration. Most of these cases, deal with the clients who come from far distant-places and have to travel back immediately.

*“We look at our clients equally...in terms of providing services. But there are times when we actually take special care of certain cases where maybe the situation requires special attention. For example, someone who has paid for verification of result in the morning...And maybe this person has gotten air ticket, they didn't know that it takes many days but when they come here, they are told that it takes three days. So, we can speed up the process to make sure that the individual is given that service so that they are not inconvenienced on their trip.” - P1*

Part of the individualized attention, also, one respondent acknowledged that customers must feel that they are *valued* by extending the organization’s office hours for those who come very early, and even come later after the closing time. The decision of opening during lunch time also manifests care.

*“...We have operational hours. We start from 8am to 4pm. But if a client came in earlier, ordinarily we would say we have not opened but we feel for them and we just tell them to say. Okay, come through and we attend to them. And even those clients who come later than our closing hours. We also open throughout lunch...we realise that other clients would want to utilise their lunch to seek our services.” - P15*

Another dimension is offering customers other ways to get in touch with ECZ without the hassle of going back and forth the office to follow up for their requested services-by means of telephoning. The statements below reveal how employees respond to a situation wherein customers can minimize the travel going to the office to check for their on-going transactions.

*“For other cases where the client has to wait, maybe for a few days...we normally get their contact numbers so that once the documents are ready we are able to call them to come and collect the certificate. And if there is a challenge, we are not able to solve the queries within the specific day that you told the client, we get back to them and tell them to wait abit because we don't want them to come through, maybe travel long distance and find that the service has not been attended to...” - P7*

In addition, it was revealed that to provide service quality, the following must also be considered; customer care and that the client should come first; *“our client should come first and also working within the confine of our aims, objectives and so forth. Making sure that the client*

*receives the services.” - P1; being attentive to customers’ problems: “the starting point I think is to be in a position to listen to what the person bringing the query or requiring the service is talking about. Based on that, then you would design a better approach to attend to the clients and provide the service.” - P11; being patient: “patience will help us to give quality services. Because sometimes if we rush, we might end up issuing wrong information on the document that we provide at ECZ.” – P3; and making clients feel comfortable “we make them (customers) feel comfortable when they come through. We have that courtesy as we provide our services to them.” - P15.*

#### 4.6 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) serve as the skeleton of the service delivery

Another interesting dimension which the data revealed is the influence of the Standard Operating Procedures or the SOP of the organization in service quality delivery. This is proven since many employees stress out that this dimension drives the direction of the services. The employees believe that SOP serves as the basis of all processes in the service centres as it tells employees about the “hows” of the service centre. SOP also directs the employees on different ways of handling service delivery; *“The process is well defined...once they (front officers) receive whatever query or service the customer wants, it goes to the back office where there are Examinations Officer in-charge of processing. He checks then it goes to the Senior Records Officer for confirmation. If it needs reaching the Manager, then it comes to me for confirmation and approval. It then goes for quality assurance and then it is given to the customer. So, the process is well defined in the service centre.” - P14.*

This study also reveals that the service centres do not process all the procedures related to the services within the service centres. Part of the SOP is to send some documents in the main office located in Lusaka to finally complete customers’ requests.

*“...One or two services which needs to go to the head office before the transaction is complete. For example, the sealing of statements of results or combined statements of results. We only have one seal and the custodian of such a seal is the Council Secretary. So, such products like accumulation of statements of results need to go to the Lusaka head office for it to be sealed.” - P14*

Due to this kind of SOP that ECZ service centres are practicing and following, employees strongly agree that this has been causing service delays. It was revealed that this is the main challenge employees are facing until now. Since there is a need to bring documents to the headquarters, employees rely on the returning-time of the documents to complete the whole process. In this case, employees at the centres are left with no choice but to wait until the documents return from the head office; *“As much as we would want to do a service in real time,*

*you are prevented because someone at the head office has to make a decision.” - P15. “it delays services for some clients who require those services.”- P14. and “Sometimes there are certain things that we need but the head office takes time to respond to the request that we make.”- P1.*

Because of these delays, the researchers find that this dimension force employees to create excuses or reasons to the customers to cover up the situation and thus affect service quality provision.

*“Certain decisions have to be made at the head office and we have no control. It really feels bad because you will have to give unnecessary excuses to our clients to say this has not been done. It really affects the quality of service delivery.” - P15*

As part of the SOP, it was revealed that ECZ uses external outsourcing where some specific certificates are needed to be printed outside the country. In this case, ECZ entrusts a part of their existing activities to another provider as data reveals. Further, employees insist that aside from delays in procedures, it results in drawbacks like customers being upset.

*“The hardest way of this involves the foreign supplier to produce the certificate. So, this has made some clients complain about time the process takes for the service to be complete. They come here they shout “my document is still not ready, something like that” - P3*

The abovementioned delays as argued by employees are as a result of “operating structures”.

Overall, employees believe that there is a need to reorganize some of ECZ’s protocols by shortening them to achieve quality of services; *“Currently, I think the process is a bit too long. A lot of individuals are involved. I think, they need to be streamlined to make it more efficient for us to deliver quality service.” - P9.* Others claim that although some procedures are okay, external outsourcing as mentioned earlier should be eliminated to quicken the printing of certificates as the public wait for a very long time to receive academic documents; *“People have been waiting for a certificate for three years, but the certificates are not coming. So maybe next time in the tendering, they should have someone nearby instead of all the way overseas in the United Kingdom.” - P5.* Participant 15 mentioned specifically that the service guidelines need to be adapted and changed in order to serve the customer in a better way. The guidelines should be reviewed together with the employees’ who deal with the customers directly. *“They would need to be changed or amended...they need to include people that are at the service centre. We are the people that also deal with the clients..” - P15.*

Moreover, there are also inconsistencies with the implementation of procedures in ECZ as some employees point out that some influential personalities use their connection at the head office to advance their service requests. This data reveal bias to be existing at the ECZ service centres.

*“The other challenge is lack of consistency in some regulations. I will give you an example of name amendment. Candidates can come with name amendment in Kitwe. Then, I will say, name amendment cannot be done because it is a name change. Then, this person will appeal to my supervisors who are in Lusaka. Those in Lusaka who are above me, they will use their discretion and resolve the query for the client. So, the public make comparisons and say no, I saw it from my friend and the name was corrected.” - P14*

Aside from the aforementioned findings, “teamwork” has also affected this delay as data reveal. Most of the employees emphasize that the organization is facing problems on the *lack of coordination*. The lack of coordination occurs among employees in the centres themselves. They claim that there is no coordination in the way things are happening in the service centres; *“there is no proper coordination in the way we work as a team in making sure that the process that is involved to complete a certain chain in providing services is actually followed. So there is no consistency in certain processes.” - P1*. They also emphasize that there is no officer-in-charge for a specific function whenever the supervising staff is not around; *“There is need to delegate if the authorising officer is not in station.” - P18*. *“For example, when we need to prepare a document - a certificate, there is a typist involved, if she is not there or she is not available, then it will pend. Sometimes, you may have a typist and then they type the document It then comes to me, I check and take it to the next office. That person may not be in the office. So, it will pend.” - P15*.

Lack of coordination has also been seen between the service centres and headquarters. Employees agree that this is another crucial part of the service. It has been found that they don't normally get updates about the progress of the documents they are processing from the officers at the main office. This results in employees being unaware of what is happening on the status of what they are processing and it contributes to delays: *“They are supposed to communicate to us on the stage at which the printing of certificates has reached. But we don't get any feedback from there.” - P18*. Participant 15 added that *“We have to send it (document) to the centre meaning at the head office and there people have so many things that they are doing. So, the query...it takes a bit of time at the head office.”*.

Aside from lack of coordination, one of the dimensions that affect teamwork as revealed in the data is *individual performances*. It is argued by some employees that delays also occur because of employees' incapability to do their tasks on time as services demand. Supported by the claim of one participant, this gives a challenge on meeting goals and delivering services; *“It will become very hard for me to deliver a service on time or in time just because the other person is not doing the right thing on time. I will give a promise to the client to say...this issue give me two days and you will be served. The next person is either taking his time or he is out of the office for some days. By the time he comes back, you ask for the same and the say "Ah, that document I don't know where it is, do you have another copy?" So it becomes very difficult for me to meet*

*my goals” - P2. Moreover, one of the respondents stated that some officers will leave the work undone giving you no idea that work was not done yet; “Sometimes you will find that the queries have been received and then the officer would just keep it on his table. Sometimes you find yourself disturbed because when the client comes, you didn't work on the documents.” - P7.*

Another dimension that is revealed in this study affecting teamwork is *internal communication*. The employees agree that communication of information among employees especially between supervisors and subordinates must be strong and up to date as this leaves the employees unaware. An example as argued by participant 2, is when he can't answer a client who asks why there are sudden changes of prices, he then forwards the client to a manager for explanation. Further, he believes that this prolongs service delivery due to the issue of no communication. Communication of information between employees is revealed to be inconsistent. Participant 2 claims that he is informing customers differently from his colleagues causing them to give different information to the customers. Thus, making customers confused; *“I will give the information according to what my supervisors have told me. Here comes another person in the same position as me, who will give a different side of the information to the client. Then the client will say ‘but last time I meet another person, this is what he told me. Here, you are telling me something else’.”*

In short, internal communication was found to be problematic at the service centre and it caused many customers misinformed and unhappy. From the employees' viewpoint, lapses in internal communication is seeming is a recipe for a bad service from the ECZ and it leads to customers dissatisfaction

#### 4.7 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) speeds up services

Many respondents seem to agree on how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has helped to quicken the service processes they offer to the public. They expressed this by appreciating the roles of technology specifically the organization's internal ICT system in making their work easier and providing services as faster as possible. Unlike in the past, where the operations in the organisation were done manually. It also helps them to follow the cases easily and retrieve information quicker which were some of the challenges in the past.

*“...With the introduction of ICT and internet, you are able to provide the service just there and then. And the retrieval of information is easier now. It has really helped us...to enhance a provision of service to our clients...and we are able to deliver our services to our clients promptly and effectively.” - P4*

Moreover, there are some areas under ICT that were believed to be essential in service quality delivery. Firstly, employees need a certain “software” specifically to print certificates from their end at the service centre. They stated that this will speed up the process of completing the service; *“We need right equipment which can be used for us to attend to the client. Like a certain software for printing of a certificate.”* - P8. Further agreed by participant 4; *“It would have been better if the software could be provided to the ECZ so that we can do it within the organisation. But you can imagine if someone pays for a certificate and ends up getting that certificate after three years, it becomes abit, you know, difficult for the client.”* Currently, the service centres rely on external sources for printing certificates as part of their operations. Secondly, “user-friendly database” helps in sorting out information and concerns amidst Zambia’s issues on the internet; *“We are looking at for example a database that we use. I think it is quite user friendly for us as we work. We find it very easy to sort out our queries at this time despite the country experiencing erratic power outages.”* - P17.

In addition, the “internal network system” affects the communication between the head office and the service centres as they are dependent on the system to process service requests. If the network is down, services are prolonged; *“The challenge could be communication between the service centre and us here. Sometimes, it is not so good. Sometimes, it can be due to maybe the breakdown of the system. Sometimes, it is not always available.”* - P13. Also, internet connection is crucial in delivering service. If the internet is fast, then the process will be done faster. If it is slow then services are slower: *“The internet connection is slow so you will find instead of serving the client let’s say within two minutes, you would have done the receipt, the client will within five or ten minutes just stand and wait for the connection to be done and to print out. So, that usually affects service delivery. Sometimes, the services are faster but sometimes the internet is quite slow”* - P5.

Finally, with the power of online technology, respondents agree that having customers access “online services through a website” like verification and payments will contribute a lot in providing service quality. They believe that this will allow customers to save time and resources contributing to better customers experience.

*“I think the inclusion of technology in our processes will improve service delivery much more in a way...where we allow a client to verify results online as opposed to clients coming physically to ECZ to have their qualifications verified. Once, we have seen that the clients have paid, then we will allow for this particular client to be able to get the service online...If the centre is closed or full, a client can look for other options using technology.”* - P12

## 4.8 Employees' empowerment encourages employees towards service quality

Considering that this study focuses on the employees' perception of service delivery, one of the dimensions which arose from the data is the need to empower employees to better their performance in serving the public. Through "motivation", a dimension affecting this category, employees agree that they have to be encouraged to keep going: *"I think we also need a motivation in a way. I think there are some activities where we are sidelined at the service centrr."* - P1. Added by the same respondent, lack of motivation results in emotional disturbances like feeling of unimportance in the team: *"In my case, there are times when I even regret to say, my coming to work at the service centre has put me in an awkward institution where I no longer feel I am part of the team. We feel we are a sidelined in most of the activities that maybe can be more motivating to us."* Further, this respondent claim that employees are secluded in trainings and out-of-town trips especially those activities that involve money and thus, making them not motivated: *"We are not involved in the trips and workshops. All those things we don't have them here and those are things that involve money. And as you aware that money is actually at the centre of everything. So, that is a kind of motivation we need."*

Moreover, to address these concerns, data show that there is need to motivate the employees through good rewards program like *incentives* to be happier in the workplace: *"the workers should be happy with their jobs, they should be given good incentives, they should be given a good working environment"* - P4. Monetary incentives also arise from this study as data show that it is part of the motivational dimension to employees: *"Motivation of employees in terms of conditions of service, increment of salaries and so on."* - P13.

Additionally as part of the motivation, it was revealed that *"training"* is considered as an important aspect in order to deliver service quality to the customers. The employees strongly point out that there is no training for them in the operational processes and how to deal with the customers.

*"We are not receiving any training in line with our operations here...The training in terms of dealing with customers, especially us at the front officers who are facing the customers. We need that kind of training. We are just using our initiative and now it has even turn to be experience. But I am sure that it will make a lot of sense if we were given a formal training even a short training."* - P1

*"We need constant training in customer service delivery or customer relations. I think most of the officers at the council need that because of the nature of the work that we offer to the public. So, customer relations on the part of the front desk officers, I think is very important."* - P9

Furthermore, they believe that through constant training in customer relations, employees will be able to acquire skills in dealing with different clients.

*“They (employees) do not have the skills, proper skills to be able to handle different clients and also maybe skills just to handle simple queries that the client will come with. And in my own opinion, I think to improve on service delivery, we will need from time to time conduct orientation. Orientation programmes for our staff based on the service centre.” - P12*

Aside from customer services related trainings, it was also revealed in the empirical data that trainings on the use of ICT system is needed for service quality delivery. Employees agree that to enhance security of any data in the system, employees must be knowledgeable about it.

*“We have a situation where you may be using the system that you don't really understand what goes on. It is possible that certain people who may not be faithful can come and manipulate data on your system without you knowing problem. There is need for the employees to be trained in ICT.” - P4*

Lastly, to make sure that the above issues are addressed, employees suggest that ECZ should include the creation of team that will look at the “well-being of the employees”. The data show that the organization has management that oversee all the activities in ECZ but not focusing on the employees’ welfare alone. Thus, they argue that the creation of a team that will address all issues concerning employees leading to better service provision.

*“For a long time, we have had no representation at this institution in terms of an organisation that can look at the welfare of employees because we usually just get management just handling the whole thing even without consultation from the employees. So, I would think if we had representation, an independent body that looks at the affairs of the employees, maybe it would go a long way in improving issues at this place.” - P13*

## 4.9 Convenience makes services accessible

Convenience has been revealed from the empirical data as a dimension that affects service quality. Employees believe that if customers access services of ECZ with convenience, service quality is provided. Under this category, it was revealed that sub-category “location” is affecting convenience.

Employees agree that the closer the ECZ comes to the public, the more it will be accessible paving way for customers’ fast and easy access to council services. This makes “location” as an important dimension affecting convenience. In the past, some of the customers denied the services of ECZ due to its distance from the people; *“In my opinion, one is the location of the premises. This has really affected our services because some clients have been denied services*

*because of the location...” - P14. But the creation of ECZ service centres paved way to public's comfort in reaching the institution; “It has brought council services closer to the people. As you are aware in the past, we had only one centre which was in Lusaka. So, people from as far as North western province, Luapula province and many other provinces used to come to Lusaka. But with the opening of the service centres, people are now able to travel short distances to receive the service.” - P14. By having two service centres, it helps lowering the travel cost of the customers giving them the opportunity to save time and other resources; “It has cut on the transport costs which the customers were subjected to.” - P16. “by creating the service centres...is cost effective to the people. Most of our clients appreciate that they are able to just cater for the minibus to reach the service centre.”- P18.*

However, some of the employees assert that the current location of the service centre in Kitwe is far from the business area and a bit challenging to locate which causes difficulties for the customers. Employees claim further that the location is isolated; *“...The physical location is far from the Central Business District. We are isolated from the Central Business District...client calls, we start giving directions until this person reaches where we are. So, the location of the facility really affects the delivery of services to the public. Some people just get lost in town, they cannot locate the service centre. They are put off and they go back. So, I feel the physical location of the office does negatively affect our customers...” - P14*

#### 4.10 Manpower fuels service delivery

Mentioned by almost all of the employees, manpower appears to have a strong impact on service quality provision. Employees perceive that the speed of services also relies with the manpower of an organization. In ECZ, it was revealed that, there is a shortfall of manpower which extremely affects the quality of the service. Many employees argue that this shortfall results in forced-multitasking of workers where one has to do plenty of several tasks to attend to the customers' needs. Further, the data suggest that this causes prolonged time waiting of customers and worst, service delays. Employees agree that this is one of the reasons why customers become unhappy and unsatisfied.

*“...There is an aspect of a shortfall of manpower...in my case, there will be a long queue. All those people that are waiting to be attended to by me, they are meant to wait for longer period because I am supposed to go and collect the document from the safe or anywhere within the building. As a result of that, you will find that some clients will go out complaining that the service delivery or the service quality is not good because of the shortfall of manpower...Because the same officer is expected to do multiple roles so you have no choice but to leave the client waiting. So that is not good at all.” - P1*

The employees also agree that addressing the issue on manpower will enhance the delivery of quality services to the public. They argue that there should be enough people who will work

specific roles like receptionists to ensure effective organizational functions and management. This study also found that employees perceive sufficient manpower as a triggering dimension in service improvement.

*“...The service centre like this one, at least the receptionist should be there. So, from reception at least now somebody can combine the enquiries at the reception. Before the officers are reached, at least the reception and enquiries should be there.” - P3*

*“If we were a team of probably three or more people, we would have effectively managed to serve the institution in areas of corporate affairs and communication. And so, what I can say is that the fact that there is only one person, it actually limits how far you can go in doing certain things.” - P9*

Directly concerning employees, this issue of shortfall causes them to be stressed due to multitasking that was mentioned in the preceding findings.

*“In my department there, the only thing that is there is I think we are just supposed to be two and I am just alone. So, you will find sometimes here during peak times that I am just alone throughout. So it is quite stressful. The issue of human resource.” - P5*

*“The manpower is not enough. And the employees have to do more duties. They are overloaded which make it difficult for them to deliver in good time.” - P8*

*“The only bad part is that it means long working hours now. We have to put in more than the normal working hours in order to meet most of the deadlines in place.” - P17*

*“You find you are overwhelmed with a lot of work. You may be required to do some monitoring work, you may be requested to do these. So, certain jobs suffer as a result of being overburdened with work.” - P13*

# 5 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion. Based on the same themes identified in the findings, the first five themes were based on the original dimensions of SERVQUAL model. Moreover, the researchers found the last additional five themes emerged from the interview data which are important dimensions that need to be considered and addressed when providing service quality. All the ten themes were analyzed and discussed with supportive literature in order to deepen the understanding of the employees' perception on service quality. Further, the new emerging dimensions were recommended to be added to the original SERVQUAL model in order to understand service quality from the employees' perspective. At the end of this chapter, the summary of the discussion will be presented in order to recap and make a clearer view with figures.

## 5.1 Analysis from the Identified Themes

### 5.1.1 Tangibles create impressions and provide comfort

Tangibles refer to Physical facilities, Equipment, and Appearance of Personnel (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). Using the empirical material as the basis of this analysis, it is argued that employees of the ECZ perceive tangibles as a dimension that creates customers' impressions towards an organization and provide comfort to both customers and employees. This is confirmed because many of the respondents mentioned about how the physical appearance and the environment of the organizations' workplace affect the image of the ECZ and provide conducive working place for both customers and employees. Considering the concept of effects of physical attributes of an establishment to customers as discussed in the theoretical framework, this perception can be explained by the fact that tangibles has direct influence on how customers perceive service quality (Alsaqre, 2011). Bateson (1985) also argued that customers consider physical environmental factors in selecting establishments to enjoy the services. The employees' interpretation of the possible effects of having a pleasant working environment is affected by the concept that they are also considered to be internal customers of the organization (Musaba, Musaba & Hoabeb, 2014). In this case, employees tend to put their feet in the customer's shoes to know how they would feel with the facilities if they were the clients.

Revealed in the findings under tangibles aroused four sub-categories as believed by the employees to have more impact when it comes to this dimension; the first is the "Building". The employees agree that there should be an effort in enhancing office appearance to help create a

good impression in customers' mind which is in line to the claim of Hanaysha (2016) that service providers must strive to vigorously satisfy clients through attractive physical environment to build strong images in the minds of the public. The data of this study reveals that employees are concerned about the initial impression of the customers the moment they see or enter the building premises of the establishment. The second is the "Work Spaces". Another subcategory arising from the data is the impact of areas and spaces inside the building of an organization. The employees recognize the importance of having a spacious area in providing better customer service experience. Mentioned in the literature review, this claim can be related to the idea that office set up along with facilities like furniture and accessories used can tell the productivity of the whole workforce in the organization (Gifford, 2012). Moreover, the employees also stressed the importance of having conducive environment as a high dimension motivating them to further provide better service quality. This is in agreement to the claim of Morgan (2015), that the workplace is essential for employees to do productive businesses. The third is "Equipment and Facilities". Data also revealed the importance of equipment and facilities as a major partner of the employees in providing services. This argument is supported by the truth that every business involves the use of some sort of equipment which employees need to perform their job (BizFilings, 2017). Moreover, they claim that it will also benefit the customers since they don't need to go anywhere to avail other services such as ATM machines leading to additional convenience at the customers' end, which is related to the idea that because of modern technology, most of the hard and time-consuming work has become so simple (Ramney, 2012). In the same manner and using the concept that employees are internal customers, researchers argue that these machines will also benefit them both for work and personal use. Modern electronic machines under this subcategory are claimed to provide quick access to the public under one roof depending on their needs. In line with this, Lehtinen and Pobleto (2010) argue that the use of technology-based self-service such as ATMs is a key improvement for the organisation to provide a better service quality.

Furthermore, employees stressed out that having necessary tangibles in the working environment brings comfort to both customers and employees such as providing seats to customers so that they can talk comfortably to the employees and in return employees become confident in dealing with the clients. Tangibles facilitate greatly in service delivery processes as believed by the employees such as books for record keeping, and power generators in avoiding power outages. This claim is line with Baron and Greenberg (2003) who claim that workers would rather desire working conditions that result in greater physical comfort and convenience.

However, the absence of such working conditions amongst other things can impact negatively on the workers' mental and physical wellbeing (Baron & Greenberg, 2003). Considering this claim, employees perceive that additional tangibles like tables, suggestion box, and information billboard in the area will help them quicken the delivery of services.

The fourth dimension affecting tangibles as mentioned by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998) is the “Appearance of Personnel” which was totally agreed by the employees. They claim that similar to a building that creates impressions, the way employees dress contribute to creating impression which is in line with the above authors claim that employees appearance creates long term impressions. In fact, employees’ well-presented appearances can even balance customers’ negative impressions as Lee et al. (2012) argued, which is agreed by the employee as they believe appearances can add confidence to the clients.

Overall, data reveals that employees indeed embrace the importance of tangibles in creating the organizations’ image and in providing comfort out of conducive environment.

### 5.1.2 Reliability ensures accuracy

Relying on the original definition of reliability as the ability to perform the promised service in a dependable and accurate manner to the customers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry 1988), the employees’ opinion regarding this category reveal their interpretation as customers themselves (Musaba, Musaba & Hoabeb, 2014). Hence, they perceive reliability as another dimension affecting the overall service delivery since they claim that this construct ensures accuracy of service delivery. This further proves the claim of Parasuraman, Zethamyl, and Berry (1988) about accuracy being a determinant of reliability. Relatively, De Chernatony (1999) states that if employees provide accurate services, trust and confidence is indeed built by the customers. Moreover, employees believe that there should be exactness in all the services that ECZ provides to produce accurate services. Egeland (2017) argues that customers expect accuracy from the employees during service interactions and if services are not delivered as expected by the clients, then services are not accurate. He added that managers, and even employee’s workmates expect correctness from each other to produce accurate services. Thus, this study suggests that for employees to be able to provide accuracy, they must first receive accuracy themselves.

Further employees argue that accuracy can be achieved by following the standard acceptable regulations or the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of the organization which was also identified by the researchers of this study as one of the critical incidents of service quality. Part of this is the detailed inspection of data by several officers working together in the ECZ to ensure accuracy of the final output. This proves the claim of Ashiagbor (2014) that to provide accurate service outcomes to the customers, a workforce committed to pursue cross-organisational collaborations is needed. The employees proved this idea by stating that ECZ involves more people collaborating in this process to justify the correctness of the service.

Finally, this study suggests that there is need to make sure that the services are accurate before delivering them to the customers. This is a vital dimension that should be dealt upon seriously as it leads to customers’ satisfaction and affects service quality provision.

### 5.1.3 Responsiveness acknowledges and reacts on customers' needs

Defined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), responsiveness refers to the willingness to help customers and provide prompt services. Responsiveness impacts service quality in that it helps recognize and respond to customers' needs as revealed in the findings of this study. Considering the mentioned meaning of responsiveness, employees seem to agree that "Promptness" is one of the key attributes impacting this category. Keh et al. (2013) states that promptness is the readiness of employees' to provide services in a timely manner. This is manifested by the ECZ employees as they believe serving customers in the quickest time possible without unnecessary delays thereby, making them happy and satisfied. It is agreeing to the claim of Wang (2015) as well as Tom and Lucey (1995) that customers will be more satisfied if the actual wait is shorter than expected compared to where the actual wait is longer than expected.

Affecting promptness as perceived by the employees is; *understanding the client's needs*. Understanding clients' needs includes the perception that clients have reasons why they acquire services, and these reasons should be understood to serve them better. According to Vasella (2015), understanding clients' needs and meeting their demands gives competitive edge to an organization. Thus, understanding clients is fundamentally important and it requires a deeper acknowledgement of the customers goals acquiring services in the delivery processes. Therefore, researchers argue that the more understanding employees are, the more responsive they become.

Promptness as has been revealed in the findings, exceeds expectations of customers and thus leading clients to be confident, satisfied, and it promotes the institution themselves. Gladin (2003) mentioned that a happy customer shares two to three people about his experience with the service interaction. However, absence of promptness results in services delays, making customers unhappy and making it more critical since an unhappy client shares his experiences to eight to ten people even reaching twenty, Gladin (2003) added.

Another dimension affecting responsiveness based on the empirical data is the "Willingness to help customers" which pertains to "the extent to which front-line staff members provide help to the customer and show willingness to serve" (Liu et al., 2016, p. 468). According to the findings, an example of this is being available to attend customers' needs at all times. Based on the concept of Keh et al. (2013), the helpfulness of the employee includes that the employee must not be too busy to respond to the customers' request. Additionally, although employees are mandated to help the customers as part of the mission of an institution, willingness to help is an act that requires deeper emotions. Supported by the study of Keh et al. (2013) which confirm that the willingness to help reflect the motivational aspect of the employee's behaviour which is linked to their intrinsic motivation. Thus, the researchers of this study argue that willingness to help is different from the mandate of the organization of helping customers. The more employees are connected to their work, the more willing they become in helping customers.

The last to affect this dimension as perceived by the employees is “Waiting Time”. According to Bielen and Demoulin (2007), the length of the queues that arise from waiting time have a negative influence on customer service perception. In the same sense, the researchers of this study argue that the more the employees become ineffective, the longer they wait for the necessary steps to be taken in delivering services.

To sum up, the researchers of this study argue that responsiveness can therefore be considered as the starting point of the service-interaction processes. It is also under this category which determines whether or not the customers’ query will be resolved within the expected time.

#### 5.1.4 Assurance creates attachment between employees, customers, and the organization

Assurance referred to as the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). The empirical data suggest that employees must be “Knowledgeable” enough about the different procedures of ECZ. As discussed by Wilson et al. (2008), employees who are knowledgeable about the service process, appreciate the corporate vision and thus play a great deal in meeting the customers. They claim that this has a positive influence on the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. In this sense, the researchers of this study argue that the quality of service delivery is reflected in the knowledge exhibited by the employee and the solutions provided to bring about great customer experience.

Part of the knowledge, correct and enough information has been agreed to be very crucial in attending to clients. This was proven since employees mentioned that by providing correct information about the “hows” in getting a particular service, makes customers understand the processes. It was also argued by the employees that customers greatly rely on the information they give to them. The role of providing correct information in service delivery has been mentioned and is related to the claim of Fluss (2016) who reveals that, employees should be knowledgeable to ensure that they are working in tandem with existing policy to satisfy customers during the first contact. He added that when correct information about the service procedures and processes is communicated accurately, it makes it easy for the organization to conduct business with the customer.

On the other hand, misleading customers by means of misinformation results in serious consequences affecting reputation of organisations concerning erosion of trust (Business Ethics Briefing, 2014). This seemed to be agreed by the employees as they declare that misinformation definitely mislead customers making them confused and unsatisfied about the services. They also assume that this scenario will keep customers coming back to the service centre just to deal with the same matters leaving customers unsatisfied. This seem to agree with Fluss (2016) claim that

customers feel the organisation does not care about their time if their request is not resolved at first contact. Thus, the ideas of employees on the matter is proven in this study.

Moreover, specific knowledge on every task in the organization is believed by the employees to affect assurance. As noted by Hill and Lineback (2011, p.129), “to do collective work that requires varied skills, experience and knowledge, a clear and compelling purpose, and concrete goals and plans based on that are critical.” It therefore requires that every member should have the knowledge in the assigned task to contribute to the effectiveness of the team in delivering great customer experience. Without this no service group coalesce into a real team (Hill & Lineback, 2011) and in this case, the researchers argue that the ECZ should deal with employees development related to their skills and capacity to do a specific task.

Besides knowledge, another dimension affecting assurance is “Quality Assurance” process where several employees and specific tasks are involved. The ECZ seems to guarantee that the final output that they release and deliver to the customers are exact. Workforce is related to productivity, and the more workforce is involved the more efficient services become (Thibodeaux, 2017). This was revealed to be true in the ECZ since employees agree that having more people participating in a process promotes security enhancement and quality assurance. In a renowned assessment organization such as the ECZ, quality assurance process is important to maintain controls and standards set in upholding best practices. By maintaining these standards at ECZ, it assures the customers that the qualifications and ultimately service delivery is credible and internationally comparable.

Revealed in the empirical data, “Employees’ Character and Qualifications” also affect assurance. Some of the employees’ expressed that *personal characteristics* such as; being friendly, honest and polite are also necessary attributes that employees should have to gain the trust of customers. Supported by her claim, Steenkamp (2015) states that these characteristics are basics of satisfying the needs of both clients and organisations. She also added that these define employees who “work well with others” and contains “positive attitudes” which is essential in service delivery. Moreover, the *qualifications of the employees* prior to taking roles in ECZ is also believed to affect service quality. Specifically, educational qualifications was given emphasis by the participant which can be related to the ideas of Day (1999) who states that delivering service quality is largely dependent on the competencies and skills of service employees. The fact that employees are internal customers and are always the first to get in contact with outsiders (Musaba, Musaba & Hoabeb, 2014), the educational qualifications they possess empowers them to have the freedom to support and provide technical solutions to the customers in line with existing policy (Fluss, 2016). Thus, it can be argued that the educational qualifications makes the employees decide what’s right for customers and helps build the status of the organisation.

On the other hand, “negative impressions of customers about public services based on their previous experiences” remains a challenge. However, once proven wrong by the employees by exceeding their expectations, employees perceive that customers become happy and slowly gain trust and confidence in the organization. This is consistent with Dixon, Freeman and Toman (2010) who claim that exceeding customers’ expectations during service interaction makes them more marginally loyal. It is also supported by Timney (2017) who states that employees play a critical role in building loyalty among the customers. It therefore creates a compelling customer experience (Timney, 2017) and which the researchers of this study argue, offsets any negative perceptions customers have towards the service provider. Thus, customer’s perception is another dimension affecting assurance.

To sum up, the researchers of this thesis project conclude that assurance creates an attachment that serves as a bridge between customers and the organization to further provide service quality.

### 5.1.5 Empathy makes customers feel equal and valued

Originally defined by Parasuman, Ziethaml and Berry (1988), empathy is the provision of caring, individualized attention to customer. In continuously knowing employees’ perception on service quality, data revealed that the need to show care and extend personalized services to customers affect service quality. The fact that employees believe that these characteristics will result in customer satisfaction, it is supported by Bitner (1990) who points out that the employees, especially front-line staffs who have to face the customers, need to respond to the needs of each customers and also resolve any problems encountered in order to enhance customer satisfaction. Moreover, Kong and Jogaratnam (2007) confirm the fact that personalisation of services and courtesy proved to be significant predictor of customer satisfaction. Employees further agree that by treating clients with equality regardless of where they are coming from, adheres to their mission of providing services to all the members of the public being a government agency. It is essential for public sector organisations to serve customers equally in line with acceptable standards, in order to satisfy the rights of its customer base (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). It can be argued that this act manifests reduces inequalities and eradicates discrimination while providing the service. Benjamin (2017) mentions that discriminatory practices affect the organisations within the community it serves. This is true especially if the organisation offers poor services to a specific group of people, like ECZ as a parastatal organisation. Relatively, discrimination among employees leads to employees refusing to participate in friendly conversations, smile or keep good grooming habits and this is especially detrimental to the organization if it is a front office personnel representing the organisation (Finn, 2017). Thus, out of this exposed data, the researchers argue that “Equality” is a subcategory of empathy since equality demonstrates care where no one is discriminated nor considered to be superior to others.

The employees also accept that providing “Individualized or Personalized Services” to customers in special cases adds impact to service quality delivery. Keogh (2011) defines individualized

services as a flexible range of support tailored to the needs of the individual and are primarily determined by the person. According to Keogh (2011), this provision enables people with different conditions access the service like any other ordinary citizen instead of having to fit into standardized models and structures. In other words, an individualized service implies being able to deliver services to meet the customers' needs in the way they want them delivered (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012). The empirical data show that this type of service is offered by the employees after understanding customers' situation like the distance being travelled by the customers and the time it takes to be able to visit the service centres. It was further revealed that employees prioritize these customers considering their circumstances. Thus, the researchers of this study argue that employees of the ECZ go beyond customers' expectations. In a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012) which focused on transforming the citizens experience for public services, it states that individualised services extremely helps to provide routine government information and services to its citizens in convenient and user-friendly ways. Therefore, this creates the feeling of being valued which is one of the dimensions that produces a satisfied and happy customer. In this respect, greater support is reported by Ariani (2015) who affirms that when employees express concern for people with divergent needs, it generates a positive and satisfying customer experience which adds to building a favourable corporate image.

Part of individualized services the ECZ employees are doing is asking the customers' contact details for updates about their requested services. This action, can indeed help the customers save efforts and finances going back to the service centre only to find out that their requests are undone. The researchers argue that by doing this, customers save energy, time and resources leading to customer satisfaction. This is supported by the ideas of Ankrah (2012) who states that technological advancement like telephones have customized most of public service transactions by allowing transparency, efficiency, interactive services and cost reduction outside the encounter. The status quo has offset public service delivery uncertainty and produced satisfied customers for the ECZ.

Also, continuing services during lunch time, which is being offered by ECZ to serve those clients who are only free during that time is agreeably an act of care. This manifests empathy as Auka, Bosie and Matern (2013) state that providing convenient operational hours is one of the criteria to evaluate empathy. Further, this is consistent with Ariana (2015) who affirms that employees who have adequate emotional resources show empathy, respect and care in order to help the customer. Thus, this claim is confirmed by the attitude the employees have exhibited by going an extra mile to operate even during lunch time to attend to the needs of the customers at the service centres.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned discussion, this study suggests that empathy has an essential role in service delivery as it makes both customers and employees feel important, valued, and an integral part of the service delivery process.

#### 5.1.6 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) serve as the skeleton of service delivery

Being the basis of all transaction procedures in an organization employees reveal in the empirical data that Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) is the skeleton of the service delivery as support to the claim of Amare (2012) that SOP is an essential domain of an effective management system to help cultivate transparent systems, implement error preventive measures, and facilitate corrective actions. In a nutshell, these are the procedures that are being followed by all the people involved in service delivery processes.

Considering the argument of Amare (2012), employees agree to this when they claim that SOP tells them on what and how to do things. SOP also tells who should take part in a certain task and who should do things and who should not (Johnson, 2017). He argues that SOP ensures that there is consistency and the processes are completed correctly by responsible officers. He adds that SOP gives a better understanding of the business processes, it is easier to replicate these processes across the organisation, saves time and money as well as improves communication. From the service point, the SOP makes employees' jobs guided because they no longer have to guess since all the steps are clearly outlined and information on any relevant issues is made known to the service employees. SOP thus becomes the basis for training any new employees to service quality mindset (Johnson, 2017).

The creation of ECZ service centres aimed at providing services to members of the general public in a conducive environment. It was part of the decentralisation policy and the service centres were earmarked to be established in areas which are close to the general public in different parts of the country as stated in the previous chapters. This means that people can now visit the service centres to process their requests easier. However, although the service centres are capable of providing the services, part of the SOP is to send some documents to the main office for other important procedures to take place before the final release of the output to the clients. The researchers of this study argue that service centres do not have the full autonomy to provide the services. Saragih (2011) reveals that autonomy is associated with greater job satisfaction because employees have more freedom to determine their own efforts in the service delivery processes. Arguably, the pitfalls of not having a full blown autonomy is that it denies flexibility on the part of individuals providing the service for the organisation. The fact that the processes are not streamlined, the use of SOP become more restrictive, it is time consuming and it creates a complete working environment ideal for bureaucratic management style (Amare, 2012). This was supported by the employees when they express that this is causing serious delays in completing requested services of the clients. The process of sending documents to the

main office is seen to be a challenge as returning-time is concerned. Considering Dube-Rioux, Schmitt and Leclerc (1989) arguments, waiting can be time consuming, annoying and incredibly frustrating. These factors impacts service delivery as it leaves employees with no choice but to wait for the processes to take place before releasing documents to the clients as data reveal. Therefore this study suggests that; as the employees wait, customers wait at the same time.

Employees perceive that part of handling customers in service delivery is to make sure that customers are assured that they are getting the correct details pertaining to the services they request including updates. However, the delays mentioned aboved, have been found to be causing more problems as data suggest. Employees exert efforts in convincing their clients that all is well, making them create stories and reasons to cover up the situations on delays. Clearly, this is against the idea of reliability (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988) through which employees should perform the promised services accurately. Thus, making the service delivery poor.

### *Operating procedures as an existing problem*

Considering the discussion above, the “operating procedures” itself is seen to be a problem. Supported by the employees from the findings, the practice of not completing things done in a single place brings hard time to them. As reveal by the emmployees, the ECZ contracts out services in order to ensure that they meet acceptable standards in examinations and assessments. Apparently, the ECZ outsources the printing of examinations questions papers and certificates abroad. This is to assure the authenticity of the documents since Zambia has no capability to do so at the moment as revealed during the conduct of this study.

This practice of letting external organization take part of the organizations’ activities is referred as external-outsourcing which is defined by Pine (2017) as the strategic use of outside resources to perform activities normally handled by internal staff and resources. She added that one reason why service organisations outsource, is to maximise the use of external resources which the ECZ is doing as of the moment. Mentioning its reasonable purpose, surprisingly, it was revealed that on the other hand, this process brings serious problems on both customers and employees of the ECZ. The employees declared that it takes two to three years before certificates are printed. This seems to agree with Pine’s (2017) additional input that not all outsourcing are successful, careful consideration should be taken cared of before doing so. The researchers of this study therefore conclude that external-outsourcing if possible should be avoided and must only be applied if it really deemed necessary. Moreso, the location of supplier for the outsourced service should also be considered depending on the need of the organisation.

Another dimension proving that ECZ’s SOP is a problem itself is the inconsistency in the implementation of the rules and regulation as employees claimed. This is common in the public sector as most services are poorly rated by customers due to non-proactiveness, inconsistent

service offerings, non-implementation of requests and not knowledgeable about the procedures (Linell, 2008). Specifically, people with social-influence to the higher management of ECZ are given special consideration without justifiable reasons, which is negating to the concept of giving individualised attentions mentioned in the empathy review of this study that customer should be given equal treatment irrespective of their background. This act of inequality is observed by the employees to be a reason of comparison by customers to advance in the procedures which clearly contradicts the concept of equality in which no customer should feel or experience any discrimination which may lead to loss of confidence and trust in service delivery.

Looking deeply, researchers argue that customers cannot be blamed on this since they clearly saw an example that those acts are possible in the organization. Therefore, in some cases, customers' actions rely on employees' behaviour and practices. This study suggests then that strict compliance to guidelines and procedures must be adhered to in providing services to the customers.

Summing up, this study suggests that issues on SOP of the ECZ needs to be scrutinized again to further improve its services with emphasis on shortening the procedures as revealed in the findings. In view of the fact that SOP can be applied in any entity, it can be customised to allow creativity, reduce bureaucracy and provide reasonable flexibility which leads to the delivery of quality service, it is therefore recommended that SOP should be reorganised in a cost-effective manner while upholding quality (Johnson, 2017).

### *Teamwork*

“Teamwork” represents a group of collaboration of people empowered with a common goal to work as a team to achieve specific objectives (Heathfield, 2017). In other words, teamwork represents people who respect each other, are transparent, regularly communicating, honest and can share information which is needed to achieve a common purpose. On the other hand, the findings reveal that affected by *lack of coordination*, *individual differences*, and *communication*, teamwork is one of the existing problems in ECZ which contributes to poor SOP implementation. Teamwork is considered a common issue in an organization as Lencioni (2003) found on his study that very few companies make teamwork a reality. He further states that organisations “often end up creating environments where political infighting and departmental silos are the norm” (p.1).

Using the argument of Bass (2017) that lack of coordination in an organization decreases productivity, confuse processes and delay the accomplishment of tasks, the revealed findings are proven. Employees claim that coordination is lacking inside the service centre making it hard to deliver services. No proper delegation of officers whenever needed is an example of this which results in delayed service delivery as observed by the employees. This scenario further gives burden to those who are left in the office to continue with service provision. Moreover, the lack of coordination between the service centres and headquarters is also an issue in the ECZ.

Employees in the centres claim that they remain blind on the updates of documents after submitting them to the headquarters in Lusaka. Therefore, this study suggests that organisations must consider coordination among members of workforce to deliver services without delays.

Another dimension affecting teamwork as perceived by the employees is individual performances. This includes the capability of the employees to deal with the tasks given as data further reveals. The employees declare that some employees are irresponsible in doing their tasks contributing to service delays. This scenario is clearly explained by Mayhew (2017) that organization's success depends on employees' performance; poor performance is detrimental to the company's success. Thus, employees' individual performance is crucial in service quality delivery.

In order to discuss the third dimension affecting teamwork, the researchers of this study suggest literature on effective communication among employees within the organization. Smith (2017) claims that communication can be tricky to be applied perfectly in an organisation. Employees seem to agree with this assertion, when they say that employees especially those who deal with customers directly are not well informed about the updates of the services like pricing. However, when all members of the team communicate smoothly, it will generally improve the workflow and productivity (Smith 2017). Supported by Anaza, Rutherford and Widdows (2012) they said that knowing practices inside the organisation affects job satisfaction and leads to service quality outcomes. Further agreed by the employees, they claim that not knowing important information inside the ECZ leads them to misinforming clients which further results in customer dissatisfaction

To conclude, the researchers of this thesis aim to highlight that employees refer to several dimensions associated with organizational regulations and personality differences to emphasize the role of SOP in service delivery.

#### 5.1.7 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) speeds up services

When it comes to the application of modern technology at the workplace, work becomes quick and easy as perceived by the employees of ECZ. They added that the aid of technology solved challenges of slow service delivery procedures in the past. According to Ankrah (2012) as stated in the review of literatures, this is a reality since technology is now regarded as business driver. He even argued that ICT helps in giving ease and efficiency to service providers resulting customer satisfaction.

One of the major concerns that the empirical data revealed is the inclusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an important dimension in service quality delivery in employees' point of view. Based on the findings, technology holds a remarkable role in employees' day to day activities in the workplace. This is visible as employees narrate the

importance of ICT in their specific roles and how it affects their performances and customer service experience. This revelation is supported by the argument of Muchiru (2014) as she said that technology has successfully involved customers in the design and service delivery processes of any organization.

Under this added dimension, the empirical data show three important sub categories that impacts service quality. These are *internal network system*, *computer programs*, and *online services*. Internal network system as regarded by the employees refers to the IT system that they are using inside the organization. This type of system is exclusive for all the employees who work within ECZ and have been found essential in the service process and keeping confidentialities that only the organization can disclose. Muchiru (2014) further argues that continuous adoption of technology in service organization create secured methods for delivering services. Relating this argument to employees' benefits as discussed in prior chapter of this study, Kandampully and Ria (2001) state that technology brings positive effects in enhancing employees' service delivery performance and improve their effectiveness.

Relating to Ankra's (2012) argument that investing in technology can meet convenience, the data reveal that employees agree when they claim the need of specific user-friendly software and data based computer programs that will enable them to print certificates and access data easily. It was stated in the previous chapters that ECZ is utilizing external source for their certificate printings that causes major delays in service process. Thus, this study suggests organizations to invest in technology to deliver services as fast as possible. Investing in technology is supported by Republic of Kenya, (2001) as it states that there should be willingness to invest in technologies to ensure service quality provisions.

Moreover, online services has also been revealed as one the dimensions that contribute to service quality. Employees agree that technological advancements where allowing customers to access ECZ whenever, wherever they are is a great idea in service quality delivery. The empirical data show not only letting customers access the organization but also letting them interact with ECZ using the internet through the use of website and online services such as payment. Agreed by Muchiru (2014), online services has been considered to one of the most needed services of customer in today's technological advancements. Proven to contribute in customer satisfaction, as stated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012) in the literature, customers can access services at anytime in anyplace in their own convenience through modern technology and drives customer satisfaction. Further, this enhances the chances of customer-engagement in developing services and outcomes that creates more loyal customers (Muchiru, 2014).

Lastly, as customers are demanding for fast services, Muchiru (2014) agrees that indeed, ICT speeds up services offered to customers.

### 5.1.8 Employee Empowerment encourages workforce towards service quality

The empirical data shows that empowering employees greatly affects the delivery of service. Firstly, as argued by Elnagal and Imran (2014) and Shah (2011), employees are the most valuable assets for the organisation as they are invariably source of knowledge and abilities that cannot be imitated by the competitors. As such, employees who are legitimately empowered feel valued at competent and consider their job responsibilities to possess excessive meaning and impact in their lives (Demirci & Erbas, 2010) Thus, the need to strengthen the workforce is perceived. Schneider, White and Paul (1998) add that the key to enhance employee performance producing service quality is to support them through management practices. The researchers of this study therefore argue that employee empowerment triggers encouragement for employees to work.

The data further shows that empowering employees is being driven by a dimension called “Motivation”. Mentioned in the reviews of previous studies, motivation represents the psychological process which causes an individual to take persistent actions which is related to the accomplishment of a specific goal (Mitchell, 1982). Elnaga1 and Imran (2014) maintain that motivation bring many positives results to the organisation such as; quicker response to customers, communication, teamwork, employees participating in creating their own goals; increased employee contribution and satisfying work. It can therefore be said that employees need motivation to perform optimally as they are excited about their job. Perhaps the most important aspect to note is that motivated employees are happier and infuse everything they do with purpose, energy and enthusiasm (Engagement Multiplier, 2016).

On the contrary, Elnagal and Imran (2014) state that lack of motivation takes away self-belief and a sense of independence which translates into decrease in loyalty and personal effort for the organisation. With decreased employee’s self-confidence, the researchers of this study argue that it takes away the spirit of team which inhibits the sharing of information and best standard practices leading to unsatisfactory service delivery outcomes. With this set up within the organisation, it is therefore obvious that lack of motivation increases employees’ job dissatisfaction. This argument is supported by the employees when they declare that this leads to emotional distress like having the feeling of being outcast from the group. The sense of belongingness in a team is essential in reaching goals as a highly engaged employee increases innovation, productivity and performance (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2013). This is also supported by Kanter (2010) who states that individuals contribute through their thoughts, competencies and skills to the team and allow different obligations to attain the high level objectives. Thus, this study suggests that service organisations must exert effort in empowering employees to develop and internalise a quality mindset which ensures that service delivery attains the highest service quality.

Arising from the data is *incentives* being believed by the employees as one of the motivating tools to empower workers. This therefore support the claim of Bonner and Sprinkle (2002) that an incentive represents an inspiring effect which drives an individual internally to take action and motivates them to perform a specific task that ultimately produces quality work. One example of incentives that employees mentioned is monetary incentive which relate to travel benefits and annual bonuses. These findings are also consistent with Jenkins et al. (1998) who found a positive relationship between financial incentives and performance.

“Training” was also revealed in the findings to be a dimension of motivation as agreed by many employees. It was stated in chapter 2 of this research that training is critical to the delivery of service quality as it provides benefits for both employees and the company as a whole since trainings addresses weaknesses and improves performances of the employees (Frost, 2017). Considering this concept, the researchers of this study argue that employees must be exposed to trainings for continuous learning and skills development. Surprisingly, employees of ECZ service centres are not receiving any trainings regarding their jobs and personality development. This picture clearly secludes employees from opportunities of improving service quality delivery. Thus leading to downgrade of performances. In a study conducted in the Malaysian public sector organizations, Zumra (2014) found a significant and positive link between training and transfer of training, and also between transfer of training and service quality of employees in the Malaysian public sector organizations context. The results suggest that employees who learned and gained new knowledge, skills and attitudes from training, will apply them to the workplace and contribute significantly to service quality provided to the customers. The study confirms that trained employees feel empowered and committed to produce positive outcomes for the organisation.

Specifically, data shows that employees on ECZ service centres need trainings on customer service handling since they are always exposed to the general public. The staffs who have been assigned to the service, only use their experience to attend to clients. Similarly, trainings on ICT was also mentioned by employees stating that not all of the ECZ workforce are knowledgeable in modern technology. They claim that ICT knowledge is an advantage in service quality delivery which is in line with the idea of Ankrah (2012) that being able to be skillful in ICT strengthens service quality delivery. Therefore, the researchers of this study claim that when competent staff are trained and designated in the right portfolios, the ECZ will enhance its capacity to effectively discharge its functions and build customer satisfaction. However, it is fundamentally important that the training is facilitated by trainers who are both knowledgeable and experienced in a particular training content (Zumra, 2014).

The last claim of employees under this category as revealed from the empirical data is the protection of the welfare of every member of the workforce as part of employees’ empowerment. Employees believe that by having a specific team intended to address employees’ issues and

well-being will empower them being valued member of the organization. In the context of management, this team referred by the employees is known as the Human Resources (HR) which roles are to identify the training needs of staff, ensuring employees welfare, and ensuring working environment is safe (BBC, 2014). Human Resource Excellence (2017) also emphasizes that HR team is very important in an organisation since it cannot build a good team of working professionals without the Human Resource. Unfortunately, this argument therefore contradicts the practice of ECZ where only an overall manager oversees all the activities of the organization.

To sum up, researchers of this study argue that employees consider their empowerment as personal driver to continue doing their tasks in the best of their capabilities in achieving service quality provision. On the other hand, lack of employees' empowerment demotivates workers leaving them unproductive.

#### 5.1.9 Convenience makes services accessible

Defined by Oxford English Dictionaries (2017), convenience refers to the state of being able to proceed with something without difficulty, the quality of being useful, easy, or suitable for someone, and anything that contributes to an easy and effortless way of life. Considering this thought, based on the empirical data, employees see that convenience vitality in service delivery is real.

The importance of convenience to customers as perceived by the employees, is explained by the argument of Berry, Seiders and Grewal, (2002) who mention that the willingness of customers to go to the service facility is highly influenced by the speed and ease of which customer can access the service. Thus, customers' accessibility to the centre is an important matter that has to be taken consideration of. Relatively, going back to the fact that employees are internal customers of an organization (Musaba, Musaba & Hoabeb, 2014), it can be argued that convenience also able employees to go to workplace with the feeling of ease and comfort.

According to the empirical data, "Location" is an important dimension affecting convenience. It is believed by the employees that good location give customers easy access allowing them to save time and resources. This claim can be related to the argument of Jones, Mothersbaugh and Beatty (2003) who state that location of services provided to customers should be at a place that minimise the travel cost of the customers. Similarly, Harris et al. (2011) state that the right to access of public service, must be realised across society so that people who need service are able to access it no matter who they are, where they are or their ability to pay. It can therefore be stated that the closer the location is to the public, the more people get to acquire services. This supported by Fredriksson (2017) who argues that "large distances may imply that the service are not used which in turn affects outcomes" (p.2) which is also related to the study of Kondylis and Manacorda (2012) on School Proximity and Child Labor Evidence from Rural Tanzania who found that school distance affects school attendance.

By creating service centres with good locations, services are provided closer to people, which is in line with the argument of Berry, Seiders and Grewal (2002) that since the service require customer's participation, it is essential to bring the service to the consumer rather than bringing the consumer to the service. However, data reveal that bad location draws negative effects in the organization. This is true as employees claim that customers are confused about the current location of one service centre of ECZ particularly in Kitwe which is outside the business centre. Employees perceive that if the centre is situated in business centres, the public will generally notice them. This perception agrees to the claim of Hamel (2008) that an office located in a busy street is more likely to attract customers than a business that is outside the busy streets.

Finally the researchers of this study argue that location, affecting convenience must be therefore taken consideration as it makes service accessible to both customers and employees.

#### 5.1.10 Manpower fuels service delivery

By making sure that there is enough manpower or workforce operating in an organization, service delivery will be of quality. In fact Thibodeaux (2017), mention that manpower is relational to productivity. She added that the more workforce are available to work, outputs are completed faster and more services can be delivered. However, it was stressed by the employees in findings that as this study is being conducted, ECZ is lacking enough people or manpower according to the number of works that organization have. On the other hand, while complete and enough manpower results in productivity (Thibodeaux, 2017), the lack or shortfall of people supporting tasks in an organization compromises and decelerates the potential growth of service quality (Sara, 2015). Additionally, when there is shortage of manpower, the response and service delivery time may get longer and employees may also feel pressured to increase efficiency (Miffling & Taylor, 2007). This is true and proven by the employees of ECZ as they feel themselves forced to do multi-tasking to cover up and speed up the processes in dealing with the customers. Though this is an initiative action from employees' end, data show that it seems to cause more trouble as the number of customers waiting start to increase while they do multi-tasking. Consequently, an employee is forced to attend to something else before attending the other guests since he has to take care of a lot of tasks. Thus, customers' time are wasted and services are delayed.

Relatively, Miffling and Taylor (2007) note that manpower shortfall leads to more stress on the part of employees and delayed service thereby compromising on the quality to the customers. As revealed in the findings, employees complain about this practice to be affecting them personally and thus, lowering their competence in service delivery. As discussed in the review of the literatures, employees become dissatisfied due to unwarranted workload and stress which is supported by Piriyanthanalai and Muenjohn (2012) who state that if employees are dissatisfied, they tend to facilitate changes to working environment internally which inhibits effective service

provision. In other words researchers argue that, manpower shortages can consequently result in the organization unable to meet the needs of the customers.

Employees agree on this matter as they feel bombarded with plenty of tasks and obligations they are not supposed to do which is hard for them to deliver services on time. Since there is a clear picture of manpower shortfall, the findings reveal that employees need to work for longer hours than the usual to compensate with the time in meeting targets. In a medical research, Leviticus (2017) found out that the longer the people work, the higher chances these people develop health problems. She also mentions that stress level increases in this case while struggling to handle workloads with little time. Unsurprisingly, employees agree on this claim as the empirical data show. Considering the study of Douglas et al. (2017) who claim that multi-tasking can have detrimental effects on task performance and increase errors on service delivery, employees' feel the same thought as data show that even the task itself suffer since they cannot give satisfying amount of attention to every work they are doing.

Perceived by the employees of ECZ, the above findings in this category give the researchers a reliable background to consider that manpower serves as a fuel to run the service provision. Therefore the present study suggests that enough manpower should be considered to satisfy employees and produce quality services. Further, the researchers argue that the more and enough manpower an organization has, the better the service will be. Contradicting, the lesser the workforce is, the poorer the service will be.

## 5.2 Summary Discussion

Considering reviews of the literatures, interview findings, and analysis, the following discussions can be drawn regarding the different themes and dimensions arising from employees' perception on service quality.

The SERVQUAL model used in this thesis showed relevance on how employees believe what service quality should be. Five themes were revealed out of its five original dimensions; Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy and Assurance. Further, additional five more dimensions were identified to be of relevance on how employees perceived service quality; Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Employees Empowerment, Convenience and Manpower. The said dimensions are summarized through the following figures. At the end of this part, the amended framework within the employees' perception on service quality (Figure 11) and the summary table of employees' perception on service quality (Table 1) were illustrated.

### 5.2.1 Tangibles

Tangibles create impressions and provide comfort to employees and the customers that they are serving. Under this category, study revealed tangibles includes building, equipment and facilities, personnel appearance, and work spaces

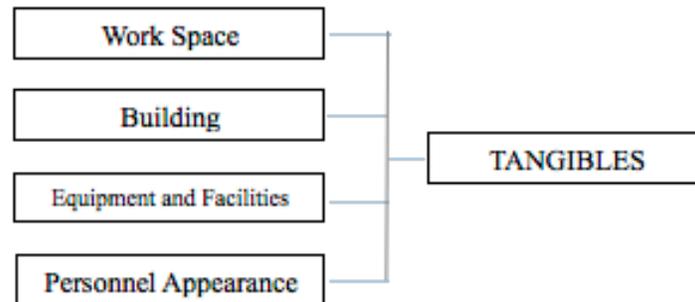


Figure 1: Tangibles

### 5.2.2 Reliability

Reliability ensures accuracy. As perceived by the employees, accurate services adds to service quality provision. Subcategory: accuracy

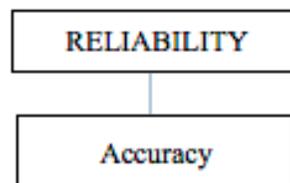


Figure 2: Reliability

### 5.2.3 Responsiveness

Responsiveness acknowledges and reacts to customers' needs. Through responsiveness, employees perceive that they will be able to address customer's query contributing to service quality provision. Subcategory: promptness, willingness to help, waiting time

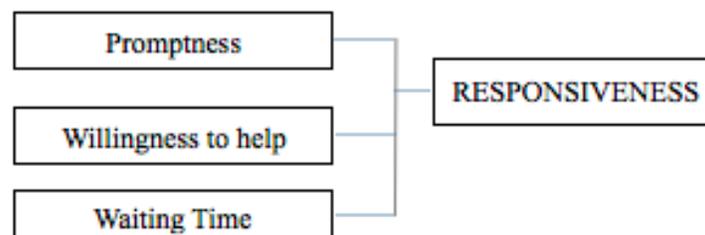


Figure 3: Responsiveness

### 5.2.4 Assurance

Assurance creates attachment between employees, customers, and organization. Subcategory: knowledge, quality assurance process, employees' character and qualification, affecting customers' perception

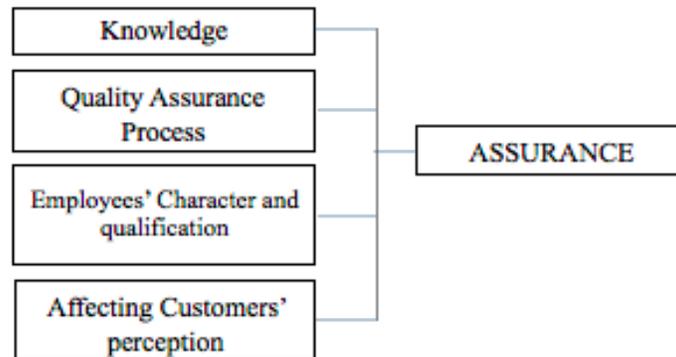


Figure 4: Assurance

### 5.2.5 Empathy

Empathy makes customers feel equal and valued. Employee seemed to agree that by showing empathy to customers, service quality is achieved. Subcategory revealed: equality and individualized attention



Figure 5: Empathy

### 5.2.6 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) serve as the skeleton of the service delivery. Subcategory: teamwork and operating structures

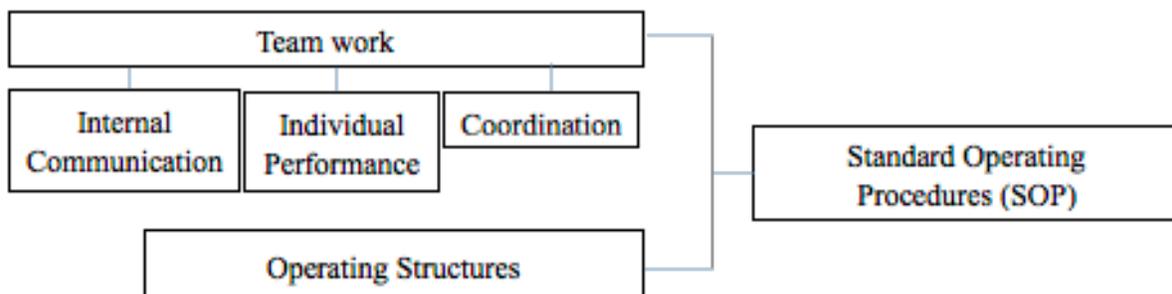


Figure 6: Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

### 5.2.7 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) speeds up service delivery. Subcategory revealed: computer Programs, internal network system and online service

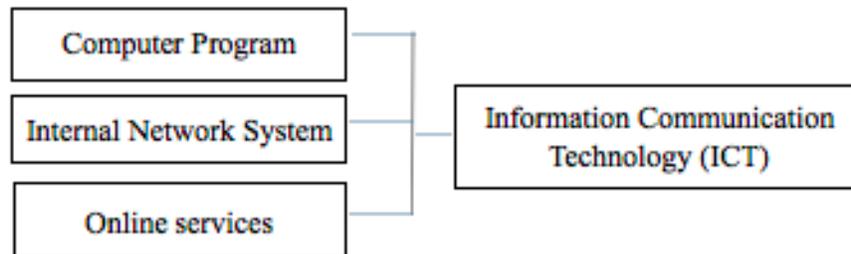


Figure 7: Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

### 5.2.8 Employees Empowerment

Employees' empowerment encourages employees towards service quality. Subcategory: motivation (training and incentives) and human resource management

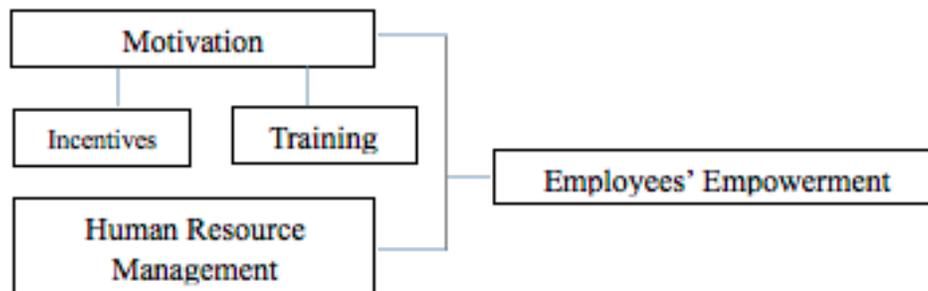


Figure 8: Employees' Empowerment

### 5.2.9 Convenience

Convenience makes service delivery accessible. Employees perceive that convenience makes it easy for customers to access the service. Subcategory: location

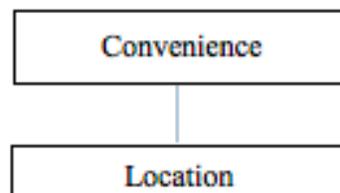


Figure 9: Convenience

### 5.2.10 Manpower

Manpower fuels service delivery. Employees perceive that the number of manpower in an organization identifies the pace of service delivery. Subcategory: number of workforce

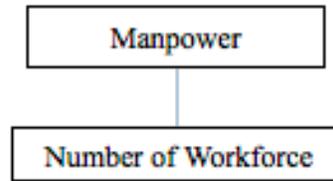


Figure 10: Manpower

Figure 11: Amended framework within the employees' perception on service quality

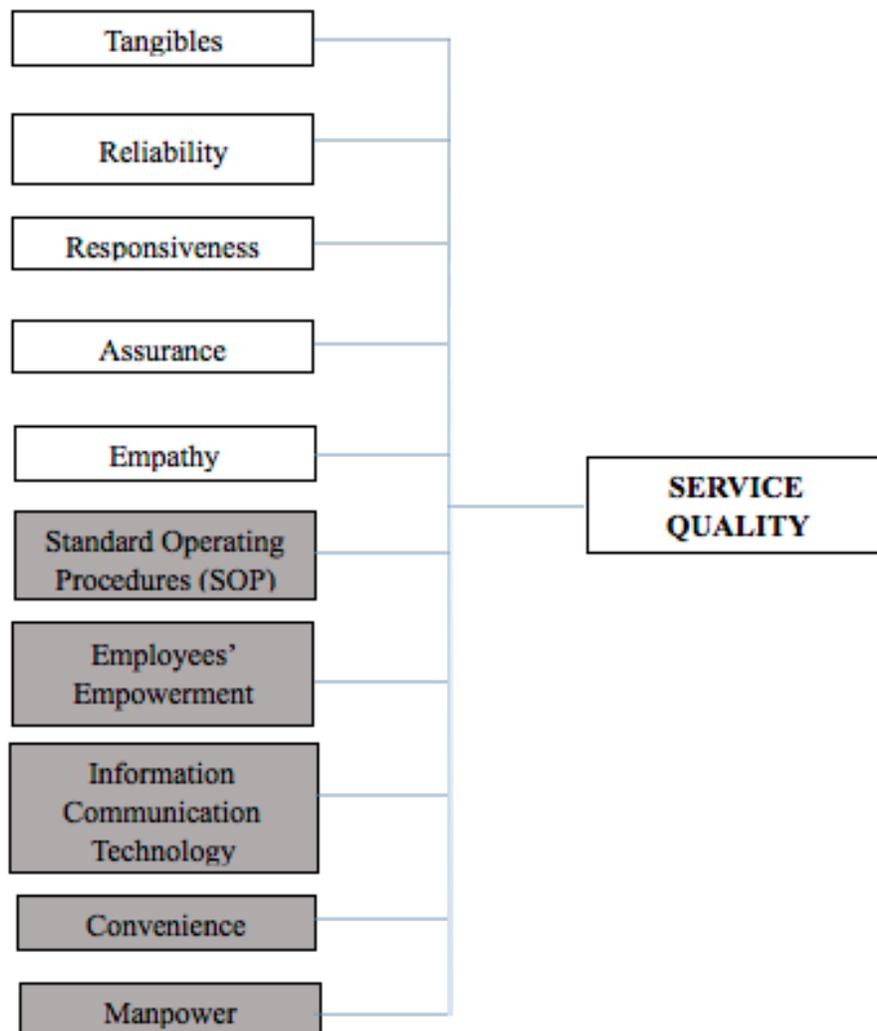


Table 1: Summary table of Employees' Perception on Service Quality

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Tangibles</b>	Create impressions and provide comfort
<b>Reliability</b>	Ensures accuracy
<b>Responsiveness</b>	Acknowledges and reacts to customers' needs
<b>Assurance</b>	Creates attachment between employees, customers, and organization.
<b>Empathy</b>	Makes customers feel equal and valued
<b>Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)</b>	Serve as the skeleton of the service delivery
<b>Information and Communication Technology (ICT)</b>	Speeds up service delivery
<b>Employees' Empowerment</b>	Encourages employees towards service quality
<b>Convenience</b>	Makes service accessible
<b>Manpower</b>	Fuels service delivery

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis is set out to explore the way employees perceive service quality specifically in Examinations Council of Zambia. The aim was to deeply understand the dimensions influencing employees in service quality provision using SERVQUAL model. Moreover, if deemed necessary, this study was also set to amend the model to fit the needed dimensions on measuring employees' perception on service quality considering that this study can provide basis for further research on service quality with emphasis on employees of the organization. Hence, the following research questions were formulated:

*How is service quality perceived by employees in the Examinations Council of Zambia?*

To further evaluate the employees' perception on service quality, this sub question was formulated; *what are the important dimensions of service quality from an employee's perspective?*

Based on this research questions, this study has identified themes resulting to an extended analytical framework that provide knowledge about the employees' perception on service quality. This includes ten themes which emerged from empirical data, literature reviews, and employees' perception. The first five themes were derived from SERVQUAL model original dimensions; (1) Tangibles create impressions and provide comfort, (2) Reliability ensures accuracy, (3) Responsiveness acknowledges and reacts to customers' needs, (4) Assurance creates attachment between employees, customers, and organization, and (5) Empathy makes customers feel equal and valued, while the other five were revealed based on the empirical data: (6) Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) serve as the skeleton of the service delivery, (7) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) speeds up service delivery. (8) Employees Empowerment encourages employees towards service quality, (9) Convenience makes service delivery accessible, and (10) Manpower fuels service delivery.

The ten themes show variety of employees' perception on service quality as summarised in Table 1. It is noteworthy that the themes reveal employees' different views towards the dimensions in service quality. This finding shows that service quality is highly dependent on the employees' individual perception on service quality. Nevertheless, it is found that employees show similar perceptions on dimensions that affect service quality explained through the amended analytical framework in measuring service quality. While the five original SERVQUAL dimensions found to be important in measuring employees perception on service quality, this study found

additional five more important dimensions needed to be added in the existing literature namely: Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Convenience, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Employees Empowerment, Manpower, and Convenience. Though convenience has been considered as sub-determinant in Multilevel Model in measuring service quality (Dabholkar, Thorpe & Rentz, 1996), to the best of researchers' knowledge, no previous studies have added the other four dimensions, nor have used these dimensions in measuring service quality in employees' perception. The reason for adding them was to fully understand and gain deeper wisdom on service quality in employee's point of view.

Finally, this study clearly shows that SERVQUAL model can be modified to measure perceptions on service quality. Evaluating the service quality of ECZ and understanding how different dimensions influence overall service quality should be able to effectively and efficiently design service delivery procedures of an organization, leading to better service to the general public.

## 6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis provides remarkable contributions to existing studies on service quality by exploring the employees' point of view. To be exact, this study provides insight and knowledge about the employees' perceptions on service quality. This therefore provide a relevant contribution to the employees-side, which is an under-researched field (Al-Ababneh, 2016) and further needing investigation. The revealed themes highlight combined thoughts of service quality perception thus, revealing valuable perceptions into the employees' viewpoint.

Moreover, this thesis improves existing knowledge on service quality, specifically contributing to SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). This study expands the authors' view in measuring service quality by identifying what has to be the sub-dimensions of Tangibles, Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Empathy in employees-side. In fact, this study found additional dimensions need in studying employees point in service quality, thus expanding SERVQUAL's model framework. Furthermore, this study contributes to the study of Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) by confirming that convenience is important dimension measuring service quality.

Thirdly, this study contributes to the continuously emerging literatures on service quality of employees rather than the customers. Further the paper applies the SERVQUAL model as a pioneering attempt of study in Examinations Council of Zambia and public sector at large. It presents results that will serve as the basis of scholars in studying public organization with emphasis on the employees. Specifically, this study enhance the existing knowledge to the study of Al-Ababneh (2016) and Ramseook-Munhurrun, Naidoo & Lukea-Bhiwajee (2010) by extending the SERVQUAL model that were used as an instrument to measure employees' perceptions of service quality.

Fourth, this thesis contributes to the existing studies on service quality using qualitative approach rather than quantitative as used by many scholars and researchers in the field. In this study, verbatims of the employees serve as the basis of the findings. Thus, enabling them to open significant dimensions not emphasized in a quantitative research.

## 6.2 Practical Contributions

The ideas created out of the findings of this study have several practical implications that should be acknowledged by managers of any public service providing organization to improve employees' satisfaction and service quality delivery to the general public.

The ten different dimensions with corresponding themes discussed in fifth chapter of this thesis offer managers an overview of a variety of employees perception to achieve service quality. The themes highlight both the benefits as well as the negative effects of the dimensions associated with service quality provision.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter where public continue to bemoan public services in Zambia (Chongo & Mengo, 2016) it is important for managers to take consideration of the themes produced in this study to address service quality issues. First, Tangibles seem to provide comfort to employees while doing their duties every day, therefore, managers should ensure that the working environment of the employees is conducive to produce productive employees. Second, managers should review Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of the organization whether it helps the employees or it gives them hard time while delivering services such as the specific procedures of service delivery, teamwork and internal communication. Third, Information and Communication Technology should be given continuous importance as it speeds up service delivery aiding employees in delivering services to the public such as; internal network system, computer programs, and online services. Forth, Employees' Empowerment encourages employees towards service quality. Hence, it is it right for managers to invest in employees' motivation like trainings, trips, and incentives to maintain their willingness and enthusiasm while delivering services. Fifth, managers should consider to locate their organisation's building in a Convenient location that is close to the public and easy to access. Lastly, managers should review issues on staffing. It has been revealed that Manpower fuels service delivery, therefore, solving issues on shortfall of manpower add to service quality.

If the aforementioned recommendations will be considered carefully by organizational heads, managers, and policy makers of ECZ and other public service-providing organization, other remaining dimensions namely Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy will be affected relatively as these dimensions largely depend on the other mentioned dimensions. Finally, it is recommended for managers to bear in mind of the ten themes presented to promote employees satisfaction leading to service quality provision.

### 6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study provides an extended SERVQUAL model analytical framework which can serve as another guide for further investigation of employees' perceptions on service quality. This study did not, however, explore any sides of the customers' perception in service quality as this focuses only to the employees' point of view. Moreover, due to the limited timeframe, this study considered only one public organization in Zambia. Although, the sample size might not fully reflect the entire population of all public organizations, however, the researchers of this study find sufficient thoughts from the employees to work with empirical analysis and able to answer the research question and identify new dimensions of service quality. Additionally, it revealed perceptions of employees in a public setting environment. Considering these reasons, it is advised that more researches are required to improve and develop the analytical framework in the future for measuring employees' perceptions. A study into other public service-providing sectors like hospitals, banks, offices, etc., are recommended to validate the proposed themes and framework and further expound them. Also, the themes and framework revealed can further be used to study employees' perceptions in private sectors.

Specific exploration into each dimension will also pave way to reveal deeper understanding of employees' perception towards service quality. To give an example, one interesting finding is the perception of employees that Standard Operating Procedures serve as the skeleton of the service delivery. The researchers of this study consider it worth it to investigate whether this theme is also perceived by employees in private organization settings. Under this, employees might be more reflective and might add more subdimensions considering private company's standards.

To sum up, further studies are required to find the following; as to whether the same themes will hold true with other fields of public organization; how these perceived themes by public sector employees differ to employees of private organizations; how effective the amended analytical framework model in measuring service quality as perceived by the employees, and lastly; to adopt different methods such as focus group to compare the findings or use quantitative method to test the amended analytical framework.

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Overview of the Examinations Council of Zambia

One of the public sectors offering services to public in Zambia is the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ). According to the ECZ Act of Parliament Number 15 of 1983, the main functions of the Council are to: Award certificates or diplomas to candidates who pass examinations conducted by the Council; Carry out relevant research in examinations; Advise any public institution on development and use of any system of testing or examining when requested to do so; Formulate syllabuses for examinations; Promote international recognition of qualifications conferred by the Council; Approve or reject appointment of examiners; Organise training courses for, or arrange for training of examiners, markers, supervisors, invigilators and other persons connected with examinations; and Invite any person or body either in or outside Zambia to assist the Council in the conduct of examinations.

Prior to the establishment of the ECZ, the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate in the United Kingdom was the examining and awarding body. Not only that, the syndicate's examinations catered for many countries and thus it was not easy for such examinations to reflect the needs of Zambia (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2009). Due to this arrangement, the country was subject to the curricula, syllabi and regulations of the syndicate with little input in the general policy of the syndicate examinations. It thus became necessary to reach a decision to localise the School Certificate Examinations (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2009) to reflect the specific needs of the country. Based on the above, the operational challenges mentioned above necessitated the need for the Zambian Government at that time, to build capacity by establishing a statutory body to conduct and administer public examinations. As such, the ECZ found itself in a position where it needed to play a vital role in the realisation of the aspirations of both the nation and the education sector (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2009).

## Appendix B: Service Quality Measurement Models

The basis for the service quality concepts are grounded in the literature of product quality and customer satisfaction (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Grönroos (1984) and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985;1988) were the first ones to conceptualise service quality and advocated for its fundamental role in service organizations. Since then, service quality models have been developed and revised to meet the different needs of organisations. Aside from the SERVQUAL, the following are some of the service quality concepts and models to give us a clear background understanding before the appropriate model is chosen for the study

### **Nordic (European) Model**

In the reviews of the concept of perceived service quality, Polyakova and Mirza (2015) acknowledges that the first service quality models emerged in the 1980 from the Nordic (Grönroos, 1984) and American (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985;1988) schools of thought. The Nordic model suggests functional quality and technical quality as the two service quality dimensions. According to Grönroos (1982), technical quality dimension has to do with what the customer receives as a consequence of the interaction with the service organization, while functional quality concerns the manner in which the customer receives the service. In the third dimension of the Nordic model, Grönroos (1988) regards technical quality and functional quality as precursors of corporate image especially of service organisations. Further, Grönroos (1988) identified six sub-dimensions of service quality and these include professionalism and skills, attitudes and behavior, accessibility and flexibility, reliability and trustworthiness, recovery as well as reputation and credibility. In the model, professionalism and skills are considered to fall under the technical quality dimension and at the same time contributes to forming a favourable image about the organization. In essence, it can be stated that the technical quality dimension of the model enhances the reputation and credibility of the service organizations. The other remaining dimensions of the model are linked to the service process and hence linked to the functional quality (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). In describing the service quality with two dimensions, the Nordic model conceptualizes the disconfirmation paradigm which perceives service quality as the gap between the expected level of service and customer perceptions of the level received (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Grönroos, 1982). However, the application of the Nordic model has been criticised and that it barely offers a practical measurement tool for service quality. The arguments which are advanced in line with the Gronröss (2001) is that the model was introduced conceptually and it lacks operationalization. Other researchers have also declared that generally that the Nordic school of thought focuses on the “conceptualisation of service quality without providing strong empirical evidence to support their position” (Ekinci, Riley, & Fife-Schaw, 1998, p. 63). In this regard, Polyakova and Mirza (2015) concludes that most of the conceptualization in the Nordic school of thought is mostly meant for hypothesis testing or the generation of theory.

## **SERVPERF**

Arising from the criticism of the SERVQUAL on conceptual and operational grounds (Buttle, 1996), this led to the emergence of the SERVPERF model by Cronin and Taylor (1992). The model suggests a long-term service quality attitudes and which the authors claim are better reflected by performance based attitudes only. The customers expectations are excluded from this scale because their expectations are consistently high (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) and in this sense, the service provider may largely experience challenges to meet such unrealistic expectations in providing the much needed service. In this respect, Cronin and Taylor (1994) holds that SERVPERF measures the quality of the service only based on customers' perceptions of the performance of a service provider. In the SERVPERF model, the number of items to be measures are halved and making the scale user-friendly to the service provider. Unlike the SERVQUAL with 44 items to be measured, SERVPERF uses only 22 items to determine the performance of a particular service (Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

According to Rodrigues, Barkur, Varambally and Motlagh (2011 cited in Polyakova & Mirza, 2015), the SERVPERF and SERVQUAL considerably differ in terms of the outcomes of their scales. They suggested that by applying SERVPERF and SERVQUAL and drawing joint inferences, the researcher can benefit from the meaningful measurements. Equally, other studies have shown that the SERVPERF unlike SERVQUAL can only provide meaningful results if the measure is adapted to the context of the study (Carrillat, Jaramillo, & Mulki, 2007). In other words, the SERVPERF is quite challenging when used in different industry settings as it requires considerable alterations to yield satisfactory outcomes. "In general, SERVPERF has been proven to be applicable and useful in measuring service quality in the airline industry" (Wu & Cheng, 2013, p.14). The other limitation of the scale is that SERVPERF measures satisfaction related to a specific transaction and nothing else. Unlike the SERVQUAL which hold that quality is an enduring global attitude towards a service (Parasuraman, Zeitzmal and Berry, 1988), the SERVPERF scale despite its generic measure of perceived quality, it is limited as it does not capture industry-specific dimensions underlying customers' perceptions of quality (Wu & Cheng, 2013).

## **Hierarchical Model**

This model was developed by Brady and Cronin (2001). The authors integrated the three components model (Rust and Oliver, 1994) and multilevel conceptualization of service quality (Dabholkar, Thorpe & Rentz, 1996). They suggested interactive quality, physical quality and outcome quality as three primary dimensions to service quality. However, all the three dimensions have their corresponding sub dimensions for measuring service quality. The sub dimensions are attitude, behaviour and experience (interactive quality); ambient conditions, design and social factors (physical environment quality); waiting time, tangibles and valence (outcome quality). According to Brady and Cronin (2001), interaction quality primarily deals with the experience a customer has with the individuals (employees) actually providing services

for an organization. The physical environment quality is primarily concerned with the physical and social setting in which the service organization operates. They refer to the outcome quality as technical aspects of service quality identified in the Nordic model. Brady and Cronin (2001) suggest that the sub-dimensions directly contribute to the quality of the perception dimensions. They argue that the customer's aggregate their evaluations of the subdimensions to form their perceptions of an organization's performance on each of the main dimensions. "In other words, customers form their service quality perceptions on the basis of an evaluation of performance at multiple levels" (Brady & Cronin, 2001, p.37) and eventually integrate these assessments to arrive at a general service equality perception.

Brady and Cronin (2001) maintain that the hierarchical model has great appeal because it incorporates and builds on the previous research on service quality models. The authors further suggest that the quantity received by consumers must be perceived to be reliable, responsive, and empathetic if the service quality perceptions is to be improved. Gunderson, Gray and Akridge (2009) also notes that the hierarchical model recognizes the complexity of the service experience and considers a wide range of aspects which influence service quality. They state that the model has been tested empirically in different industries such as fast food industry, photography developing, amusements parks and dry-cleaning industries. The author states that "robust support is found for the structure of the model, though there is also a link from outcome quality and social factors that improves the fit of the model" (Gunderson, Gray & Akridge, 2009, p.503). Therefore, those perceptions from the customers then lead to an overall service quality perception.

Despite the robust applicability of the model, there are concerns raised by other researchers regarding how the subdimensions influence quality dimensions and the interpretation of the model (Martinez & Martinez, 2010). They argue that the model has been operationalized in a different way and with the dimensions which are considered to be variables influencing subdimensions. According to Martinez and Martinez (2010), the scale is contradicting going by the variables and it raises concerns about the conceptual interpretation of the hierarchical model. They argue that Brady and Cronin (2001) had not addressed these issues in the model. The other argument was that the model and its modifications contained an implicit assumption of the dimensions as antecedents of service quality (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). This claim was initially raised by Martinez and Martinez (2007, 2008 cited in Polyakova & Mirza, 2015) who maintain that dimensions are not antecedents of service quality but expressions of the complexity of the construct. As a result, they suggested to use a third-order reflective hierarchical model which will ensure that changes in dimensions, subdimensions and observable indicators are correctly captured. According to Polyakova and Mirza (2015), the reflective hierarchical model allows an approach to service quality with a customer in mind. They further add that the reflective model provides strategic areas of improvements as well as tactical tools and performance evaluation for the service provider.

### **Three-Component model**

The Three-component model primarily focus on the relationship which exist between service quality, service value and customer satisfaction. The model was developed by Rust and Oliver (1994) who based the model on the work by Grönroos (1982) and Bitner (1992). In the model, Rust and Oliver (1994) proposes service products, service delivery and service environment as three distinct components which are essential elements of service quality to the service provider in an industry. The two authors define the service products as an element which is mainly an outcome and consists of what customers gets from the service offered. They also add that the service product concerns the customers' perception of the service from the provider. The service delivery element stands for the consumption process which takes place during the time when the service act is offered by the service provider. The service delivery element includes any other relevant events which occur during the service act. The service environment element describes the internal and external atmosphere in which a service takes place. In other words, it describes the environment which the service provider accords to the customers as they seek the service.

The only critic with the Three-component model is that Rust and Oliver did not test their conceptualisation, which becomes its considerable limitation (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). However, empirical studies confirm that similar models in retail baking have been found. The three component model was supported by Brady and Cronin (2001 cited in Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). Nonetheless, Polyakova and Mirza (2015) although the evidence application of the model in its original form is unavailable, the Three-component model has enhanced further models with deeper theoretical understanding of the service quality concept.

## Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

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### **The Employees' Perceptions on Service Quality in the Examinations Council of Zambia** **Researchers:** Ronald Mwelwa Tembo and Pranyou Promkaew

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#### Interview Consent Form

I have been given information about the research project: "An exploratory study of employees' perception of service quality at Examinations Council of Zambia" with Ronald Mwelwa Tembo and Pranyou Promkaew who are conducting this research as a part of a Master's in International Marketing and Brand Management supervised by Tommy Shih of Lund University, Sweden.

I understand that upon signing this consent, I will be asked to give the researchers information to the best of my knowledge and abilities. That I will also render 30 minutes of my time in participating the interview process. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time if deemed necessary.

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and journal publications, and I hereby allow it to be used in that manner.

Participant:

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Signature/ Name (optional)

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Email

## Appendix D: List of the Participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Abbreviation in Findings</b>	<b>Workplace</b>
1	P1	Lusaka Service Centre
2	P2	Lusaka Service Centre
3	P3	Lusaka Service Centre
4	P4	Lusaka Service Centre
5	P5	Lusaka Service Centre
6	P6	Lusaka Service Centre
7	P7	Lusaka Service Centre
8	P8	Lusaka Service Centre
9	P9	Head Office
10	P10	Head Office
11	P11	Head Office
12	P12	Head Office
13	P13	Head Office
14	P14	Kitwe Service Centre
15	P15	Kitwe Service Centre
16	P16	Kitwe Service Centre
17	P17	Head Office
18	P18	Kitwe Service Centre

## Appendix E: Interview Guide

### Preparation

- Explain the study and what it is about
- Ask if the interviewees have any questions. Ask the permission to record the interview. Ask if the interviewees want to be anonymous or not.

### Opening Question:

- What is your role in ECZ?
- How important do you think the service centre is, in your view?

### Service Quality:

- In general, what do you think about the service in the organisation? Do you think it is good? Are you happy with the service? Why is that?
- What do you think are the key attributes of service quality? What else do you think is important to the service?
- What do you think about the service process? Why is that?
- What problems or challenges do you face in delivering the service? Any other problems?
- In your opinion, what makes a good service? Why is that?

### Question for dimensions

- Tangibles:
  - Do you think the physical facilities, equipment and appearance affect the services? How do they affect the service?
- Reliability:
  - How do you ensure that the service has been served accurately as promised?
- Responsiveness:
  - Do you think it is important to be prompt? Why?
  - How hard is it to meet your deadline in delivering the service? Why?
- Assurance:
  - Do you think the customer feels confident and happy with your service? Why?
  - Do you think the customer trusts you? the ECZ? Why?
- Empathy:
  - Do you consider your customers when providing the service? How did you do it?
  - Do you provide the service equally or depend on the issue of the customers? Why is that?

Closing Question: What do you think affects the quality of your service the most

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