

**AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE
QUALITY AT THE NAMIBIA BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study, was to explore students' perceptions of the service quality offered by the Namibia Business School in relation to its degree and diploma programmes as well as to measure the gap between students' perceptions and expectations from the Namibia Business School. The study chose a sample of n=114 from a population size of N= 228 of the programmes that ran on a long-term basis, where students would have been engaged with the school for a longer period and these students had completed at least one year with the school. The questionnaires were administered and distributed using a probability random sampling technique, 114 questionnaires were given, 100 questionnaires were returned. That is 87.8 percent response rate, which is considered as an excellent response rate. 54% were female, while 46% were male. Ninety percent of the respondents were registered for a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration, Masters in Business Administration in Finance and Strategic Management. Ten percent of the respondents were in the Master of Business Administration: Natural Resources, Doctor of Business Administration and Master of Business Administration: Entrepreneurship courses of study. The study showed that students' expectations of service quality exceeded their perceptions on the five service quality dimensions. The average level of service quality at Namibia Business School in relation to the different dimensions, registered gap scores of *Tangibles* (-1.059), *Reliability* (-1.528), *Assurance* (-0.670), *Responsiveness* (-1.443) and *Empathy* (-0.919). The smallest dimension gap score proved to be *Assurance* followed *Empathy*, while the largest gap score in the study proved to be *Reliability* followed by *Responsiveness*. The data offered in this study revealed that the dimension, *Reliability* is the one that the school will have to pay attention to; the school will have to look into its ability to perform the services consistently and accurately. The findings can be used as a guide to the school's management, to improve the crucial quality attributes and enhance service quality and its performance. An improved service quality will also help the school to face the competition from other higher education institutions. Therefore, more effort in planning to improve services in order to meet the students' expectations and those dimensions which have a larger gap should be the priority.

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DECLARATION

I, Jennifer N Haihambo, hereby declares that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work in whole or part has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher learning.

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Signature: _____ Date: _____
Jennifer N Haihambo

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of service quality at the Namibia Business School. In this chapter, the background of the study is introduced, the problem statement is stated, the objectives are defined, the significance of the study, limitations and delimitations are stated.

1.1 Orientation of the study

The Namibia Business School was officially launched in 2008. Its vision is to become a world-class African institution at the cutting edge of management education, research, consulting and related services to the growing economy of Namibia, (Namibia Business School, 2011- 2015). The Namibia Business School (NBS), aims to place itself as an institution that can offer programmes that enable students to excel in the fields of finance, leadership, strategic management, natural resources management and entrepreneurship. The study programmes consist of a variety of subjects, relating to the fundamental and typical aspects of business practice. The school is committed to collaborating with both public and private sectors with a common objective to contribute towards capacity building, which will assist in promoting good governance and good management in Namibia. The school is guided by its core values which are to deliver world-class management education in an African context; to carry out world-class research from an African perspective and to provide world-class consulting in Namibia, Africa and beyond (NBS, 2010).

One of the critical success factors for the school is assuring the quality of learning by establishing processes that include: assessing the needs of the industry and stakeholders, developing an approach for screening the abilities of perspective students as well as aligning the school programmes and curricula with international practices, (NBS, 2011). Postgraduate business education is becoming increasingly competitive in Namibia, as there is an influx of well-established business schools from other countries. NBS provides postgraduate management qualifications such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (PDBA), the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA).

Tertiary education can be described as “an important form of investment in home capital development. Higher education institutions are charged with the formation of human capital through teaching, building a knowledge base through research and knowledge development, and dissemination and use of knowledge by interacting with the knowledge users” (Okwakol, 2009 as cited in Bunoti, 2013). As a provider of tertiary education, it is the obligation of the business school to provide value-added education services through enhancing the quality of the service and products that it has to offer. There are several definitions of quality. According to Nyathi, Kadhila and Aipanda, (2011), quality can be defined as a multidimensional, multilevel and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Quality may thus take different, sometimes conflicting meanings depending on the understanding of various interests of various constituencies or stakeholders in higher education.

In an academic environment, quality can be determined by the service that is delivered or received; it is crucial for a higher education institution to ensure that it provides quality service. Arpin, (2007), describes service quality, from the organisation's perspective as establishing requirements and specifications. Once established, the quality goal is primarily based on satisfying customers' needs. From the customers' perspective, service quality means how well the goods/services provided by the organisation meet or exceed customer expectations.

Since the official launch of the business school, five (5) years ago, there has been no assessment of the services that it provides to its students. This research study will attempt to determine students' perceptions of service quality at NBS.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Tertiary institutions, in general, need to be concerned not only with what the society values in the skills and abilities of their graduates, but also with how their students feel about their educational experience. (Bemowski, 1991). It is important that the school has an awareness of students' perceptions and their expectations of service delivery and the reality of the service they receive. The purpose of this study is to measure the gap between the perceptions of the students and their expectations about the service they receive. The school does not have an independent assessment of the service quality it provides. Such an assessment would help to attain the perceptions of students and their experiences. It only has feedback evaluations conducted for

lecturers. To achieve some degree of quality assurance, it is vital to measure the gap between the perceptions and expectations of NBS students and the service they get.

Darlaston-Jones, et al. (2003) stated that students are becoming more aware of their consumer rights and of gaps between their expectations of service delivery and the reality of that service. Not only does this service gap present a quality assurance challenge for tertiary institutions, but it is also likely to contribute to student withdrawal from the institution.

Literature indicates that higher education institutions can benefit by developing the service quality that the institution offers to its students. It is therefore crucial that higher educational institutions understand students' expectations and perceptions of service quality at the institution; this will enable management to develop quality assurance programs or departments to help meet the expectations of the student and various stakeholders, as well as help retain student retention.

The main objective of this study is to obtain an understanding of students' perceptions of service quality and actual service delivery at the Namibia Business School. This will allow the business school to offer an attractive MBA programme and other qualifications. This will also prepare students to compete favorably in the industrial world.

1.3 Research Objectives

The Main objective of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of service quality at the Namibia Business School.

Objective 1: To identify students' expectancies on the service provided by the NBS.

Objective 2: To investigate the service quality perceptions of students about the level of service quality provided by NBS.

Objective 3: To measure the gaps between the expectations and perceptions, and the actual service delivery from the NBS.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study will assist the management of the NBS to achieve strategic competitive advantage by incorporating the student's expectations on service quality and by trying to narrow the gap between the students' service quality expectations and the current service level. Management will also be able to develop quality assurance programmes that meet the expectations of its primary stakeholders, the students. Future entrepreneurs interested in entering the tertiary education sector will find this study of enormous assistance as a reference point in determining quality standards that should be offered to perspective students. It will also prepare these entrepreneurs with prior knowledge of what students expect and perceive as quality educational services. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on business students' expectations and perceptions of service provided in Namibia. To the future researchers, this study can provide statistics on the evaluation of students' perceptions of service quality at an institution of higher learning. Overall, the enhancements implemented following the findings of this research may contribute to the reputation of the NBS

1.5 Limitations of the study

This research was a case study based on the Namibia Business School, only, thus the results might be limited when it comes to generalisation to other institutions. Some respondents failed to return the questionnaires and the total number of respondents earmarked for the study could not be reached.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

The study was conducted at the NBS, which is located within the main campus of the University of Namibia, (UNAM) in Windhoek. The Target population was limited to the NBS. The present study was conducted in a single service sector, namely, higher education, thus some of the results particularly the dimensions of service quality may be delimited to this service setting.

1.7 Structure Summary of the Thesis

The study is organised into six, (6), chapters that investigate and evaluate the level of students' perceptions on service delivery at the Namibia Business School.

The first chapter contains the orientation of the study; a description of its purpose as well as the rationale for the study; followed by the research objectives that guided the study. Lastly, limitations of the study are outlined in this chapter.

Chapter two contains a review of literature relating to the study and covers the Construct of Service Quality; service quality literature in higher education, customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality, service quality dimensions, and the measurement of service quality in the context of higher education.

Chapter three, outlines the study's methodology which includes a justification of the research approach adopted, the data collection method and procedures, as well as ethical considerations followed in the study.

In Chapter four(4) the data collected is presented and analysed. The same chapter also discusses the results in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents conclusions and recommendations based on the findings and discussions

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A literature review is an evaluative report of information found in the literature related to a selected area of study. The study should describe, summarise, evaluate and clarify this literature. It should give a theoretical base for the research and help the author to determine the nature of the research, (Aveyard, 2007).

In this chapter, analyses of the appropriate literature will be performed. These are concepts relating to service quality. It seeks to expose the relevant concepts and models from key authors in the subject field, with a special emphasis on service quality in a higher education context.

The literature review is divided into three (3) sections: the Nature of Services, the Construct of Service Quality and Measuring Service Quality. The Nature of Services concentrates on introducing and defining services in the context of higher education. Within this section, the debate surrounding the relationship between service quality and satisfaction is explored. A section on Measuring Service Quality follows, uncovering the different instruments developed by academics to measure service quality.

Defining Service

Due to its unique characteristics; it is difficult to define the term “service”. Palmer, (2011), defines a service as the production of an essentially intangible benefit, either on its own, or as a significant element of a tangible product, which through some form of exchange, satisfies an identified need. Zeithaml, (2009), specified that: “services are deeds, processes, and performances provided or co-produced by one entity or person for another object or individual.”

Green, (2014), also has a concurring definition where he states that the concept of service can be defined as an intangible product that cannot be owned or stored, but it comes into an existence at the time and place it is delivered for consumption. Lehtinen, and Lehtinen (1982) defined service as: “Service, actually a service-like marketed entity, as a benefit providing an object of transaction that is a more or less abstract activity or process of activities necessarily produced, sold and consumed in a simultaneous interaction.”

Defining Quality

Quality has been defined from diverse perspectives. In his report, *Dimensions of Quality*, Gibbs, (2010), stated that quality might be seen to be relative to purposes, whether to the purposes and views of customers or relative to institutional missions. He further provided a conception of quality cited from Harvey and Green, (1993), that of quality as transformation, involving enhancing the customer value. Quality can be defined as satisfying or exceeding customer requirements and expectations, and consequently, to some extent, it is the customer who eventually judges the quality of a product (Baron, Harris and Hilton 2009).

Davis, Yoo and Baker, (2003), suggest that quality is not primarily seen as a defensive mechanism but it is considered to be a competitive weapon for the emergence of new markets as well as growing market share. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985) defined quality as conforming to requirements which have been set by an organization. Further, Palmer (2001) expressed that quality can only be defined by customers and occurs where an organization supplies goods or services to a specification that satisfies customers' needs.

The concept of quality control for tangible goods, describes quality regarding conformance to specifications; conformance to requirements; fitness for use; conformance to customer requirements, (Ming and Ing, 2005; Walker and Johnson, 2006 as cited in Mbise & Tuninga, 2012). Crosby(1979) provides one of the earliest definitions of quality, suggesting that it is “the conformation to specifications”. According to Crosby (1979), quality is often mistaken for imprecise adjectives like “goodness, or luxury or shininess or weight,” illustrating the indefinable nature of the construct, (Beaumont, 2012). According to Tapiero (1996) quality depends on the person making the definition, the measures applied and the context within which it is considered. “Quality is excellence,” “Quality is value” and “Quality is conformance to specifications.”

Defining Service Quality

A significant deal of authors and researchers have been drawn to the concept of service quality, and it remains a controversial concept in research literature because of the difficulties in defining it, (Baron, S., Harris, K., & Hilton, T., 2009). Asubonteng, (1996) defines service quality as the extent to which a service meets

customers' needs or expectations. An expansion of this definition is found in Parasuraman et al., (1988) who argued that service quality stems from a comparison of a consumer's general expectations with their actual perceptions of a firm. Parasuraman et al., (1985) therefore defined "service quality as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and, therefore, customer dissatisfaction occurs".

Baron et al., (2009), also claim that service quality is a highly abstract construct in contrast to goods quality, where technical aspects of quality are evident. Authors such as Berry et al., (1988 as cited in Beaumont, 2012), propose that service quality is an overall evaluation similar to an attitude. "Service quality is an attitude formed by consumers' long-term, intellectual assessment of an organization's service delivery process", (Bateson & Hoffman, 2011). Furthermore, Oliver, (1980 as cited in Saghier & Nathan, 2013), adds that customer expectation and perception are the two main ingredients in service quality. Customers judge quality as, low, "if performance, (perception), does not meet their expectations" and quality as, high, "when performance exceeds expectation".

Higher Education as a service

The aim of higher education institutions is to create and deliver knowledge and skills to enrich, equip and extend human development and understanding; which can become a core part of the nation's economic infrastructure in their own right. Generating employment and output, distributing substantial export earnings and making a dynamic contribution to the growth and improvement of society are some

other key goals. The integrity of higher education is therefore associated with excellence, professionalism and service quality. According to Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp (2014), service quality is the single qualifier or disqualifier for most organisations in service industries. Other goals are: providing university degrees and other qualifications as a launching pad for individual careers and to create economic security and social inclusion.

Higher education institutions must also improve and grow as countries develop from industrial economies to post-industrial knowledge-based economies. This has placed emphasis on individual performance objectives such as strategic service quality and service excellence. Higher education should be the premier system for preparing and equipping the nation's workers to become highly skilled and professional. The quality of the country's higher education (the product offerings and service quality) must continue to play the lead role in educating the workforce. Customer-perceived service quality is one of the key success factors for a sustained competitive advantage for both manufacturers and service providers, (Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, 2014).

According to Zhiqin, Jianguo, Fang, and Xin, (2012), higher education services refers to services provided by the higher education system to meet the specific educational needs or potential needs of the main level. It depends on the educational requirements and the central expectations of higher education service quality. If the quality of experience is higher than expected, then the education objects may believe that they have the higher quality of service. In contrast if the quality of the experience is low, they may think that quality of educational services or the level of higher education is low.

Beaumont, (2012), noted that institutions are increasingly realizing the importance of higher education as a service industry and are placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of students. Nadiri, Kandampully, and Hussain, (2009), pointed out that it is crucial for higher education service providers to understand students' expectations and perceptions of what constitutes a quality service to attract students and serve their needs. This promotes the need for higher education institutions to continue to deliver a quality service and satisfy its participating customers to achieve sustainability in a competitive service environment.

Cuthbert (1996) explained the nature of the higher education service quality as a standard service. He said that, it is an intangible and heterogeneous type of service, which is produced and consumed at the same time. Due to its characteristics of perishability, it meets the criterion of 'inspire ability and consider students as a participant in the delivery process.

Customer satisfaction in higher education

In today's competitive environment, education has not only become a leading player in any economy, but it is also an investment by parents and other stakeholders. Academic institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of students' satisfaction given that it positively influences their students' decision to continue their education at the institution in question, and on the positive word of mouth that will attract perspective students. Students' satisfaction also affects their motivation, their attendance, and the increase in the income of educational

institutions, (Harrison Walker, 2014). Kundi, Khan, Scholer, & Akhtar, (2014), concluded that there are significant relationships between service performance and student satisfaction, that will aid private, post-secondary institutions to predict and measure student satisfaction and retention. Dib and Alnazer, (2013), have shown that, in general, students' satisfaction is important to attract and retain customers; therefore, the concept of student satisfaction is also a relatively new concept in public sector universities in general.

In public as well as in the private sector, the quality of education is a significant predictor of national development which must be considered while devising strategies for attracting and retaining the students who want to get higher education, (Malik, Danish, & Usman, 2010). Mihanović, Batinić, & Pavičić, (2016) stated that a high-quality service is a prerequisite for surviving and maintaining market competitiveness in higher education. The relationship between students' expectations and their satisfaction with the quality of services provided by an educational institution plays a significant role in shaping the reputation of academic institutions.

Understanding and knowing the expectations of students, may establish a source of information for higher education institutions, and these could be involved in the creation of the strategy of developing their service quality and attaining an advantage on the market of higher education. Each interest group in higher education, students, teaching staff, government, etc.), has a distinctive outlook on the quality, depending on the particular needs of each group.

The quality of service of educational institutions is a key determinant for customers before purchasing a product or availing any service that plays a significant role in

measuring the performance of a product/service and the organization as well. This quality education is also a challenge for the public and private sector educational institutions. This is why, many of the universities around the globe are putting their heads and efforts to deliver the quality of educational services to their customers for their satisfaction, (Archambault, 2008).

Satisfaction can be defined as a judgment on the performances of a product or service by the cognitive, (functional) and psychological, (emotional), values of the product. Customer satisfaction can serve as an indicator of the success of a business in the past and present, as well as an indicator of its success in the future. Consumer satisfaction is a predictor of repeated purchase and is expressed by consumer loyalty. According to Mbise, (2015), undertaking service quality improvement can best be made with an understanding of customers and their requirements. Many factors and settings influence experiences/perceptions, which in turn, have an impact on quality evaluation. In the course of service delivery, for example, discrepancies between customer expectations and the actual service delivered may exist due to the variability of clients and the service providers. Services are characterized by the inherent intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability and, the inseparability of the consumption and production process. Students in higher learning institutions have a complex set of expectations, and student evaluations along functional and technical dimensions vary as a result of the student's experience.

Mbise, (2015), further points out that the learning experience of students takes a long time, ranging from six months, one, two, three or even more years. Services delivered by training institutions may have deficiencies as perceived by students

based on prior expectations. There could be instances in the service delivery process that institutional staff, for example, lecturers may not deliver what students wanted regarding service design or the organizational issues. Garwe, (2015), mentioned that discrepancies of service performed against the actual performance of training institutions might lead to students' dissatisfaction with the services delivered.

Harte & Etchart, (1997 as cited in Mbise, 2015), defined manufactured goods to have clear specifications for the components of a final product. Mbise, (2015), further, added that quality determination by customers is easy for tangible goods, but not the case for intangible goods/services. Intangibles are associated with uncertainties as customers cannot assess the quality of the services they are going to receive beforehand. Moreover, the evaluation of service quality is a process through which a consumer compares own expectations with the service one perceives to have received; this was established by Grönroos, (1984).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, (1988) defined perceived quality as the degree and direction of the discrepancy between the consumer's perceptions and expectations. The definitions of the concept of service quality, above, clearly focus on fulfilling customer needs and requirements and how well the level delivered by a service provider matches customer expectations.

Service performance is evaluated after the service is experienced. If the customers' expectations are high, compared to the perceived service quality received, this results in dissatisfaction. Conversely, if customers' expectations are below the perceived service quality received, then the customer is satisfied, (O'Neill & Palmer, 2004).

Identifying the gap in service delivery allows service organizations to make amendments to meet and maintain the proper standards, which are necessary for acceptable or adequate service provision. Identification of such shortfalls is possible if customer assessment of service quality is undertaken on an on-going basis. The students' motivation of pursuing studies in higher learning institutions is primarily the expected quality of knowledge and skills to be received. The knowledge and skills obtained by students is an outcome, which is realized after students have encountered multiple service experiences while in training institutions, (Zeithaml, Berry, & Gremler, 2006).

Quality in Higher Education

The concept of quality in education is not new, but to this day, it is not a well-developed field of study. There is no unified terminology and the term, "quality of education", is understood in different ways by different authors. All authors, however, adapt the concept of quality of education from industry, as in the following definitions: excellence in education [1]; value addition in education [2]; fitness of educational outcome and experience for use [3]; defect avoidance in the education process [4]; meeting or exceeding customers' expectations of education [5]. Liberalization and economization and growing competitiveness are the most significant reasons for the growing importance of the quality concept in higher education, (Shauchenka & Busłowska, 2010).

According to Ling & Corresponding (2010) the term 'quality in education' has been defined by various scholars, as excellence in education, value addition in education, fitness of educational outcome and experience for use, specifications and

requirements, defect avoidance in the education process and meeting or exceeding customers' expectations of education. Therefore, a single definition of education quality is not possible, rather, it would be more applicable to define education quality based on the criteria that stakeholders used to judge quality, and also to consider the competing views when assessing the education quality.

Mbise & Tuninga (2012), defines the quality of education as: the character of the set of elements in the input, process, and output of the education system that provides services that ultimately satisfy both internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations. The World Declaration on Higher Education, (UNESCO, 1998), declared that quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional concept, which adopts all its functions and activities, teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment and interactive networking.

Characteristics of Service

In spite of the criticality of service quality to businesses, measuring service quality causes difficulties to service providers, because of the unique characteristics of services: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability, (Douglas & Connor, 2003). In light of this, services need a distinctive framework for quality clarification and measurement. Mbise, (2015), emphasises that an examination of the characteristics of services is useful when differentiating between a service and a good, she highlighted Parasuraman et al., (1988), Giese and Cote (2000), as stating that the difficulty in defining and measuring services is generally due to their unique

characteristics; intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, perishability, and lack of ownership.

Zeithaml & Bitner, (2003), defined the characteristics of service as follows:

Intangible - services are performances or actions rather than objects that can be felt or seen as with tangible goods. For example, lecturers at a university provide information to students studying towards a degree, and even after this service is performed, the students may not fully understand the benefits received from the service itself. The only noticeable component for the student, may be the lecture hall and other facilities or equipment they use on campus.

Heterogeneous - no services will be precisely the same because humans produce them. This difference can be applied to the University scenario, in that no two lecturers deliver their modules in the same manner and no two students will experience the professor or the service delivery in the same way.

Simultaneous production and consumption - most services are sold first and then produced and consumed simultaneously. An example of this characteristic would be, some university enrolling students, lectures commencing, and information being transferred from lecturer to student at the same time.

Perishability - services cannot be stored, saved, resold or returned.

In the university context, once a subject module has been presented to a class of students, the service is complete, and the students cannot return the subject module or service delivered if they wish to withdraw from the university, before completing the degree.

Due to the intangible nature of services, problems tend to arise for both the service provider and the consumer. This can often present challenges for service providers when attempting to differentiate their offerings from that of the competition, (Beaumont, 2012). The heterogeneity of services makes most services unique, resulting in problems when attempting to standardise a service. It is inevitable that one service encounter will differ from the next within the same organisation, requiring the need to manage the service encounter carefully. Since services are an experience, they can only be consumed if the service is made available to the consumer. Therefore, production and consumption occur at the same time, resulting in most services being deemed inseparable, (Palmer, 2011).

A further distinction between services and goods is that a service cannot be stored. This results in the need to pay more attention to the management of supply and demand of the service to ensure that the service is utilised to its maximum potential. Similarly, the lack of ownership of services can be related to the inherent perishability of a service. When a service is performed, no ownership is transferred from the seller to the buyer, (Palmer, 2011). In other words, the service is essentially temporary, giving the buyer the right to participate in the service process.

It is clear that each characteristic poses significant implications for service management regarding the delivery of a quality service. This presents the challenge of understanding how the service is being perceived, consumed, or enacted when developing marketing strategies, (Hill, 1995 as cited in Beaumont, 2012).

Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

Customer satisfaction is the outcome felt by those that have experienced a company's performance that has fulfilled their expectations. Satisfaction can be defined as a judgment on the performances of a product or service by the functional and psychological values of the product, (Mihanović et al., 2016).

Many non-profit organizations such as educational institutions are becoming aware of the fact that recognizing the needs of their customers is the key factor in the success of their business. Service Quality is commonly noted as a critical prerequisite for establishing and sustaining a satisfying relationship with valued customers. In this way, the association between service quality and customer satisfaction has emerged as a topic of significant and strategic concern. In general, perceived service quality is an antecedent to satisfaction. Thus, a proper understanding of the antecedents and determinants of customer satisfaction can be seen as to have an extraordinarily high monetary value for a service organization in a competitive environment, (Fitri & Hasan, 2008).

Kotler and Clarke (1987) defined satisfaction as a state felt by a person who has experienced performance or an outcome that fulfills his or her expectation. Satisfaction is a function of the relative level of expectation and perceived performance. The expectation may go as far as before the students even enter the

higher education, suggesting that it is important to the researchers to determine first what the students expect before entering the university.

Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Dadoa, Petrovicovaa, Cuzovicband, & Rajicc (2012) defined satisfaction as “the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer’s prior feelings about the consumption experience”. Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) support this view in a service setting, claiming that satisfaction is the result of comparison of expectations before purchase and consumption with service performance, whereas positive disconfirmation increases or maintains satisfaction while negative disconfirmation creates dissatisfaction. Two different conceptualizations of the construct of satisfaction, can be differentiated in marketing literature, transaction-specific, and cumulative satisfaction, whereas transaction-specific can be described as a post-choice evaluative judgement of a particular purchase occasion and increasing satisfaction relates to an overall evaluation based on the total consumption experience with a product or service over time, (Jones & Suh, 2000; Shankar et al., 2003; Vilares & Coelho, 2003 as cited in Dadoa et al., 2012).

In marketing theory and practice, customer satisfaction has long been regarded as a central concept and an important aim of all business activities. Anderson et al., (1994, as cited in Dadoa, Petrovicova, Riznic, & Rajic, 2011), claim that increasing customer satisfaction enhances the value of a firm's customer assets and future profitability. The costs of attracting new customers are expected to be lower for the

businesses that have a base of highly satisfied customers, due to their engagement in spreading positive word of mouth.

Dimensions of Service Quality

According to Zeithaml & Bitner, (2003), service quality can't be perceived by a customer in a one-dimensional way only. Instead, it can be judged by following a multifaceted approach. With this in mind, other researchers have already looked at a few dimensions of service quality. One of the popular frameworks in this regard was proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, (1988) in which they discussed five dimensions: 1) reliability, 2) responsiveness, 3) assurance, 4) empathy and 5) tangibles, (See the framework in the appendices section). The framework's dimensions are discussed as follows:

1. Reliability

Regarding measuring customers' perceptions towards service quality, reliability is one of the core dimensions. According to Parasuraman et al., (1988), reliability is a service provider's ability to perform certain services accurately and dependably. This can surely be helpful in terms of retaining customers. As confirmed by Zeithaml & Bitner, (2003), customers might expect to re-do the business with such organizations, who repute themselves for keeping their promise. Therefore, the customer's reliability expectations must be learned properly by all service providers. In the context of this research, the examples of reliability would be: 1) services received on promised time by the business school's students, and 2) sincere interest shown by the business school staff to support students, and/or 3) performing student services correctly and maintaining error-free records.

2. Responsiveness

The focus of this dimension is on promptness and attentiveness to deal with the customer's requests, complaints, problems, and questions. Ziethaml & Bitner, (2003), have defined responsiveness as a service provider's willingness to deliver prompt services and to help customers. In their book, it was further explained that while examining the service delivery process, it is important to consider the customer's point of view first; not the organizational perspective. For instance, in the context of service delivery of the business school, the perceived standards of the students might be different from the recognized standards of the management. Thus, considering the management perspective, (with regards to service delivery), might result in low perception of services from students.

3. Assurance

This dimension refers to employees' courtesy and knowledge, and ability to gain customers' confidence and trust. According to Ziethaml & Bitner, (2003), the service providers must assure the delivery of knowledge courteously; in this way, they can inspire more trust and confidence from their customers. Ziethaml & Bitner, (2003), have further explained that a link can be formed between the company and their customers through inspiration of confidence and trust in the customers' minds.

4. Empathy

This dimension describes customers as special and unique. According to Ziethaml & Bitner, (2003), empathy has to be developed by the service providers; this would provide a positive impression in the minds of their customers because they, (customers), would feel as being especially taken care of, and provided with

individualized attention. In the context of this research, the example of empathy would be: 1) proper attention provided to the students by the business school staff, and 2) understanding the students' specific requirements.

5. Tangibles

The physical representations of services, which are used by the customers to evaluate quality, are referred through tangibles. Ziethaml & Bitner, (2003), defined tangibles as the physical appearance of facilities, personnel, communication materials, equipment and so forth. They further explained that service companies generally use this dimension for increasing their image, signaling quality to a customer and providing continuity. However, for creating an efficient service quality strategy, tangibles are usually combined with some other dimension by most of the service companies. For example, in the case of the business school, tangibles and responsiveness could be combined to ensure excellent cleaning services and well-equipped classrooms.

Service Quality and Student Satisfaction

Rasli, Danjuma, Yew, and Igbal (2011) are of the view that to achieve the dual goals of satisfaction and loyalty, service quality in the education sector especially in universities needs to be evaluated from both the internal, (customers), and external, (service providers') perspectives. Arokiasamy & Abdullah, (2012), revealed that student satisfaction is of compelling interest to colleges and universities as they seek to continually improve the learning environment for students, meet the expectations of their constituent groups and legislative bodies, and demonstrate their institutional effectiveness. Unlike service industries, which hold satisfaction as a goal in itself,

colleges and universities typically perceive satisfaction as a means to an end. Higher education institutions tend to care about student satisfaction because of its potential impact on student motivation, retention, recruitment efforts, and fundraising.

Student satisfaction measurement is considered a strategic issue for educational institutions because satisfaction is similar to profit-and-loss accounting in business organizations. If satisfaction is high, then the university is making sizeable profits as a result of having provided students with knowledge, skills and targeted abilities. Students will be pleased with their academic achievements and their university life and will speak positively about the college because satisfaction is the final goal, and the ultimate goal is a reflection of high levels of service quality, (Saif, 2014).

Since customer satisfaction has been based on the customer's experience on a service encounter, it is in line with the fact that service quality is a determinant of customer satisfaction, because service quality comes from the outcome of the services from service providers in organizations. Another author stated in his theory that "definitions of consumer satisfaction relate to a specific transaction: the difference between predicted service and perceived service, in contrast with attitudes, which are more enduring and less situational-oriented, (Arokiasamy & Abdullah, 2012).

Rowley, (1996), identified four main reasons for collecting student feedback: (1) to provide auditable evidence that students have had the opportunity to pass comment on their courses and that such information is used to bring about improvements; (2) to encourage student reflection on their learning; (3) to allow institutions to benchmark and to provide indicators that will contribute to the reputation of the

university in the marketplace; and (4) to provide students with an opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with their academic experience.

Some researchers have found empirical support for the above-mentioned view point, (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Fornell et al. 1996; Spreng & Macky 1996; Wilson et al., 2008 as cited in Arokiasamy & Abdullah, 2012), where customer satisfaction came as a result of service quality. In relating customer satisfaction and service quality, researchers have been more precise about the meaning and measurements of satisfaction and service quality.

Satisfaction and service quality have certain things in common, but satisfaction is a broader notion, whereas service quality focuses specifically on dimensions of service. Although, it is stated that other factors such as price and product quality can affect customer satisfaction, perceived service quality is an element of customer satisfaction, in this case the customer being the student. The figure below shows the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality:

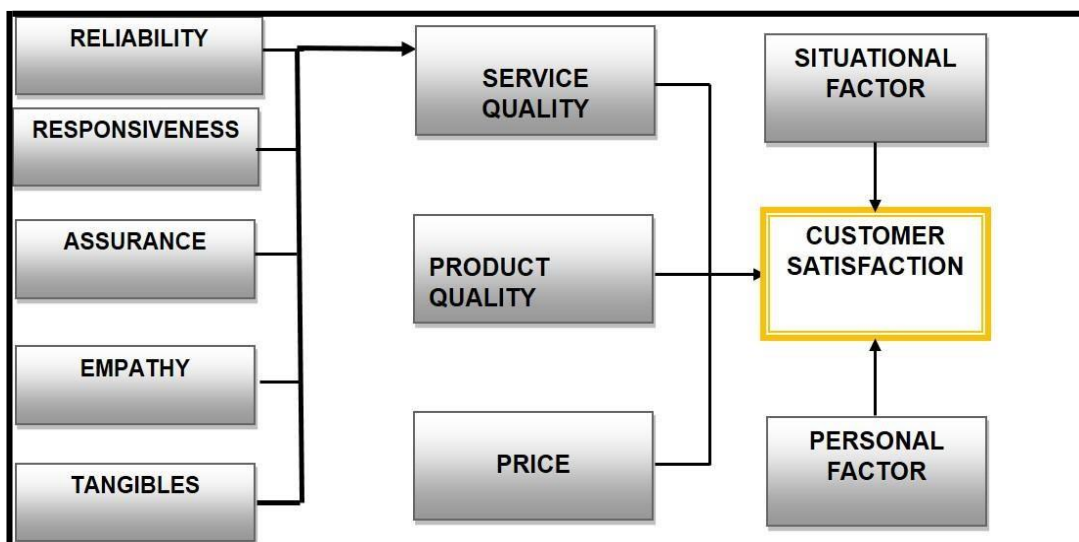


Figure 1: Customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction **Source:** Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner,&Gremler (2008)

Wilson et al., (2008), emphasized that service quality is a focused assessment that reflects the customer's perception of reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility while satisfaction is more inclusive and it is influenced by perceptions of service quality, product quality and price, also situational factors and personal factors.

Service quality in higher education

O'Neill and Palmer, (2004 as cited in Mihanović et al., 2016), define service quality in higher education as the difference between students' expectations of what they will get from a higher education institution and their satisfaction with the realized expectations. Abdullah, (2006 as cited in Khodayari & Khodayari 2011), mentioned that the overriding value in measuring service quality in higher education lies in the identification of crucial aspects of the service delivery. According to Dado et al., (2011), transition towards a knowledge-based society, whereas the key strategic resource necessary for prosperity is knowledge itself, requires quality human capital. Therefore, over the previous two decades, higher education service quality has gained the status of primary concern among academic communities worldwide. The interest in the field have also been fuelled by prevailing trends around higher education. Whereas, in the past most universities served regional needs, modern technology erases geographical barriers and makes yesterday's potential entrants, such as virtual and foreign for-profit educational service providers, today's reality. Scott, (1999), found that refuting the idea of the student as a university customer on such grounds is limited and ignores the fact that experience obtained from a university is wider than just the contact between students and academics. It has been

found that when making the uncertain and high-risk decision of choosing a university, “the student will look for evidence of service quality”.

In higher education literature, (Browne et al., 1998 ;Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005; Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002; Mavondo et al., 2004; Schertzer and Schertzer, 2004; Guolla 1999; Elliott & Shin, 2002; Winsted,2000 and Zeithaml et al. 1990 as cited in Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011), show that students’ perceived service quality is an antecedent to student satisfaction. Positive perceptions of service quality can lead to student satisfaction, and satisfied students may then attract new students by engaging in positive word-of-mouth communication to inform acquaintances and friends, and they may return to the university to take other courses, (Student satisfaction also has a positive impact on fundraising and student motivation, and service providers will only be able to deliver service encounters that will satisfy customers if they know what their customers expect in general, and if they understand the critical employee behaviors and attitudes from a customer’s point of view in particular. If lecturers know what their students expect, they may be able to adapt their behavior to their students’ underlying expectations, which should have a positive impact on their perceived service quality and their levels of satisfaction.

Oldfield and Baron, (2000 as cited in Mbise & Tuninga, 2012), maintain that “there is an inclination to view service quality in higher education from an organizational perspective”. They suggest that institutions should better pay attention to what their students want instead of collecting, “data based upon what the institution perceives its students find important”.

Perceptions on Service Quality

In their paper entitled: *Comparative Analysis of Business Students' Perceptions of Service Quality Offered in Kenyan Universities*, Kimani, Kendi, & Kagira, (2011), concluded that customers perceive service quality as critical because it determines how they assess the service. Customers evaluate a service based on their expectations. Due to expectations being dynamic, evaluations may also shift from time to time. Thus, how customers value what they term as a quality service today, (based on some criterion), may change tomorrow.

The service quality construct is mostly conceptualized in the context of service marketing literature, (Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2000). Therefore, it deals with the concept of perceived service quality. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, (1990), perceived service quality is the extent to which a firm successfully serves the purpose of customers. Customers determine the perceived or cognitive value of service based on their experience with the service delivered. Ghobadian, Speller, and Jones, (1994) stated that customers' expectations, service delivery process, and service outcome have an impact on perceived service quality. Yoo and Park, (2007), found that employees, as an integral part of the service process, are a critical element in enhancing perceived service quality.

Edvardsson, (2005), indicated that service quality perceptions are formed during the production, delivery and consumption process. The author concluded that customers' favorable and unfavorable experiences, as well as their positive and negative emotions, may have an important impact on perceived service quality.

Student Expectations

A high-quality service is a prerequisite for surviving and maintaining market competitiveness in higher education. The relationship between students' expectations and their satisfaction with the quality of the services provided by an educational institution plays a significant role in shaping the reputation of academic institutions.

Understanding and knowing the expectations of students may constitute a source of information for higher education institutions, and these could be involved in (Edvardsson , 2005)the creation of their strategy of developing their service quality and gaining an advantage in the market of higher education (Mihanović et al., 2016) Douglas, Douglas, & Barnes (2006) listed four main reason why it is necessary to look into the opinions, expectations, and satisfaction of students: (1) to get evidence that students have an opportunity to comment on the situation, and to use this information in improving the services of a higher education institution; (2) to encourage students to reflect on the process of their acquisition of knowledge; (3) to allow the institutions to set the quality criteria and to create the indicators that might contribute to the reputation of their institution on the market; (4) to give students an opportunity to express their satisfaction with their academic experience.

Theories on Customer Satisfaction

Isac & Rusu, (2014), briefly presented the different satisfaction theories based on the work of Peyton et.al., (2003), and the synthesis achieved by Vavra, (1997) :

THEORY	DESCRIPTION
<p>A. The theory of assimilation</p>	<p>If there is a discrepancy between expectations and the product's perceived performance, the dissonance will not fail to appear. This point of view on post-usage evaluation was introduced in the literature discussing satisfaction under the form of the theory of assimilation, (Anderson, 1973).</p> <p>According to Anderson, (1973), the theory of assimilation points out that consumers try to avoid discord by adjusting their perceptions of an individual product/service, to bring it closer to their expectations. In a similar way, the theory suggests that consumers can reduce the tension resulting from the discrepancy between expectations and the product/service performance, both by distorting the expectations so that they would be in agreement with the product/service perceived performance, and by increasing the level of satisfaction through minimizing the relative importance of experimental disconfirmation, (Olson and Dover, 1979). The theory presumes the consumers are motivated enough to adjust both their expectations and their</p>

	<p>product performance perceptions. If the consumers change their expectations or product performance perceptions, dissatisfaction would not be a result of the post-usage process.</p> <p>Consumers can reduce the tension resulting from a discrepancy between expectations and product/service performance either by distorting expectations so that they coincide with perceived product performance or by raising the level of satisfaction by minimizing the relative importance of the disconfirmation experienced, (Olson and Dover, 1979).</p> <p>Some researchers have discovered that the control on the actual product performance can lead to a positive relationship between expectations and satisfaction. (Anderson, 1973), Consequently, it is assumed that dissatisfaction could never appear unless the evaluation process began with the customers' negative expectations. Peyton et al., (2003), argue that the Assimilation Theory has some shortcomings.</p>
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	<p>First, the approach assumes that there is a relationship between expectations and satisfaction, but it does not specify the way in which the expectation disconfirmation can lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Second, the theory also posits that consumers are motivated enough to adjust either their expectations or their perceptions about the performance of the product. Some researchers have found that controlling for actual product performance can lead to a positive relationship between expectation and satisfaction. Therefore, it would appear that dissatisfaction could never occur unless the evaluative processes were, to begin with, negative consumer expectations.</p>
<p>B. The theory of contrast</p>	<p>Contrast The assimilation-contrast theory was suggested as another way of explaining the relationships between variables within the disconfirmation model (Hovland, Harvey and Sherif, 1957).</p> <p>This paradigm posits that satisfaction is a function of the magnitude of the discrepancy between expected and perceived performance. Generally speaking, the consumers move within acceptance or rejection areas, by their perceptions. As stated in the</p>

	<p>theory of assimilation, customers tend to assimilate or adjust the differences in product performance perception, with a view of getting them to the level of their previous expectations, but only if the discrepancy is relatively small (Peyton et. Al., 2003). A large gap between perceived performance and expectations results in contrast effects, and the consumer's tendency would be one of increasing the perceived difference. Assimilation or contrast can appear in connection with the disparity perceived between expectations and the actual product performance. This theory tries to illustrate the fact that both the assimilation and the contrast theory paradigms have applicability in the study of consumer satisfaction. Various researchers sought to test this theory empirically. Olson and Dover (1979), and Anderson (1973), found some evidence to support the assimilation theory approach. Referring to these studies, Oliver (1980), argues that there were perceptual differences between disconfirmation or satisfaction..</p>
<p>C. The theory of assimilation-contrast</p>	<p>This theory, just like the other three, is also based on the disconfirmation process. This theory developed by Carlsmith and Aronson (1963), suggests that any</p>

	<p>discrepancy of performance from expectations will disrupt the individual, producing ‘negative energy’.</p> <p>Anderson, (1973), posits that when the expectations are strongly sustained, the consumers will negatively answer any question (Peyton et.al., 2003)</p> <p>Dissatisfaction will happen if the perceived performance falls beneath expectations, or if the perceived performance goes beyond the expectations.</p>
D. The theory of negativity	<p>This theory, just like the other three, is also based on the disconfirmation process. This theory developed by Carlsmith and Aronson, (1963), suggests that any discrepancy of performance from expectations will disrupt the individual, producing ‘negative energy’.</p> <p>Anderson, (1973), posits that when the expectations are strongly sustained, the consumers will negatively answer any information (Peyton et.al.,2003). Dissatisfaction will happen if the perceived performance falls beneath expectations, or if the perceived performance goes beyond the expectations.</p>
E. The theory of hypothesis testing	<p>Deighton (1983), suggested a two-step model for satisfaction generation. First, Deighton hypothesizes, pre-purchase information,</p>

	<p>(advertising), plays a substantial role in building up expectations. Customers use their experience with a product/service to test their expectations. Second, Deighton believes, customers will tend to attempt to confirm rather than disconfirm their expectations. The theory suggests that customers are biased to confirm their product/service experiences positively. It is an optimistic view, but it turns the management of evidence into a potent marketing tool, (Vavra, 1997).</p>
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Table 1: *Summary of Theories of Consumer's Satisfaction*, Adapted from Isaac and Rusu (2014)

Measuring Service Quality

Consumers measure service quality regarding the service organization either meeting or exceeding their service expectations and perceptions (Zeithaml et al. 1990; Nell and Cant 2014 as cited in Diedericks & Klerk, 2015). Green, (2014), stated that the measurement of service quality had been illustrated along a continuum ranging from ideal quality to totally unacceptable quality at some point along the continuum representing satisfactory quality. The position of customer perceptions of service quality on the continuum depends on the nature of discrepancy between the expected service and the service perceived by the customer. On the one hand, if expectations are greater than perceptions, the perceived service quality is less than being satisfactory, and customer dissatisfaction is said to occur. On the other hand, if

expectations are less than perceptions, perceived service quality is said to be satisfactory, and will tend toward ideal quality with increased real discrepancy between expected and perceived service quality.

Grönroos, (2008), supports the notion that service quality as perceived by customers, stems from a comparison of what they feel that service organisations should offer (i.e., from their expectations), with their perceptions of the performance of organisations providing the service. Customers' perceptions depend on their comparison of their prior quality and productivity depends not only on the performance of the service provider's personnel but also on the performance of the customer. This gap between the customer's expectation of the quality of the service and the perceived quality of the service received can be explained by the Gaps Model. The Model proposes that expectations of customers are a function of disconfirmation and that a customer makes a comparison between his/her experience with pre-consumption expectations, (before-service consumption) and post-consumption experience, (after-service consumption). Based on this comparison, a state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards specific services is surmised.

In his study, *Service Quality in Higher Education: the Students' viewpoint*, Beaumont, (2012) identified SERVQUAL as an applied method to measure service quality. According to Oldfield and Baron (2000 as cited in Nadiri et al., 2009), student perceptions of service quality in higher education, particularly of the elements not directly involved with content and delivery of course units, are researched using a performance-only adaptation of the SERVQUAL research instrument.

SERVQUAL represents service quality as the discrepancy between a customer's expectations for a service offering, and the customer's perceptions of the service received, requiring respondents to answer questions about both their expectations and their perceptions, (Parasuraman et. al., 1988 as cited from Theories used in IS research, 2006). The use of perceived as opposed to actual service received, makes the SERVQUAL measure, an attitude measure that is related to, but not the same as, satisfaction, (Parasuraman et. al., 1988 cited from Theories used in IS research, 2006).

Parasuraman et al., (1991, cited from Theories used in IS research, 2006), presented some revisions to the original SERVQUAL measure to remedy problems with high means and standard deviations found on some questions and to obtain a direct measure of the importance of each construct to the customer. Beaumont, (2012), noted that the model incorporates the following five dimensions: **Reliability:** The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. **Responsiveness:** Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. **Empathy:** The caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers. **Assurance:** The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. **Tangibles:** Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.

Nadiri et al., (2009), cited the work of Parasuraman et al., (1988), as they defined service quality as 'a global judgment or attitude relating to the overall superiority of the service and proposed that the overall service quality performance could be determined by a measurement scale called 'SERVQUAL' that uses five generic dimensions:

- (1) Tangibles – the physical surroundings represented by objects (for example, interior design) and subjects (for example, the appearance of employees);
- (2) Reliability – the service provider’s ability to provide accurate and dependable services;
- (3) Responsiveness – a firm’s willingness to assist its customers by providing fast and efficient service performance;
- (4) Assurance – diverse features that provide confidence to customers (such as the firm’s specific service knowledge; polite and trustworthy behaviour from employees); and
- (5) Empathy – the service firm’s readiness to provide each customer with personal service.

Parasuraman et al., (1988) developed the Gaps model of service quality, which has been used since 1990. It has been widely used by many researchers when analysing the gaps between customers’ expectations and their perceptions (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The Gaps Model of service quality serves as a conceptual framework for understanding service quality delivery. Based on evidence that perceived service quality is a function of the difference between consumer expectations and perceptions, Parasuraman et al. (1988. as cited in Arpin. 2007), conducted an exploratory study to establish how consumers evaluate service quality. The study suggested that, regardless of the service or service industry, consumers use the same criteria in assessing service quality.

Service organisations can use the Gaps Model to identify feelings of dissatisfaction which occur when actual service delivery does not meet the customers' expectations of service performance, implied in the company's communication (Arpin, 2007, p.18). Companies need to close the gap between what customers expect and what they receive. The central focus of the Gaps Model is the Customer Gap, the difference between customers' expectations and their perceptions. Firms need to close this gap between what customers expect and receive, to satisfy their customers, and build long-term relationships with them. The figure below illustrates the model of service quality gaps:

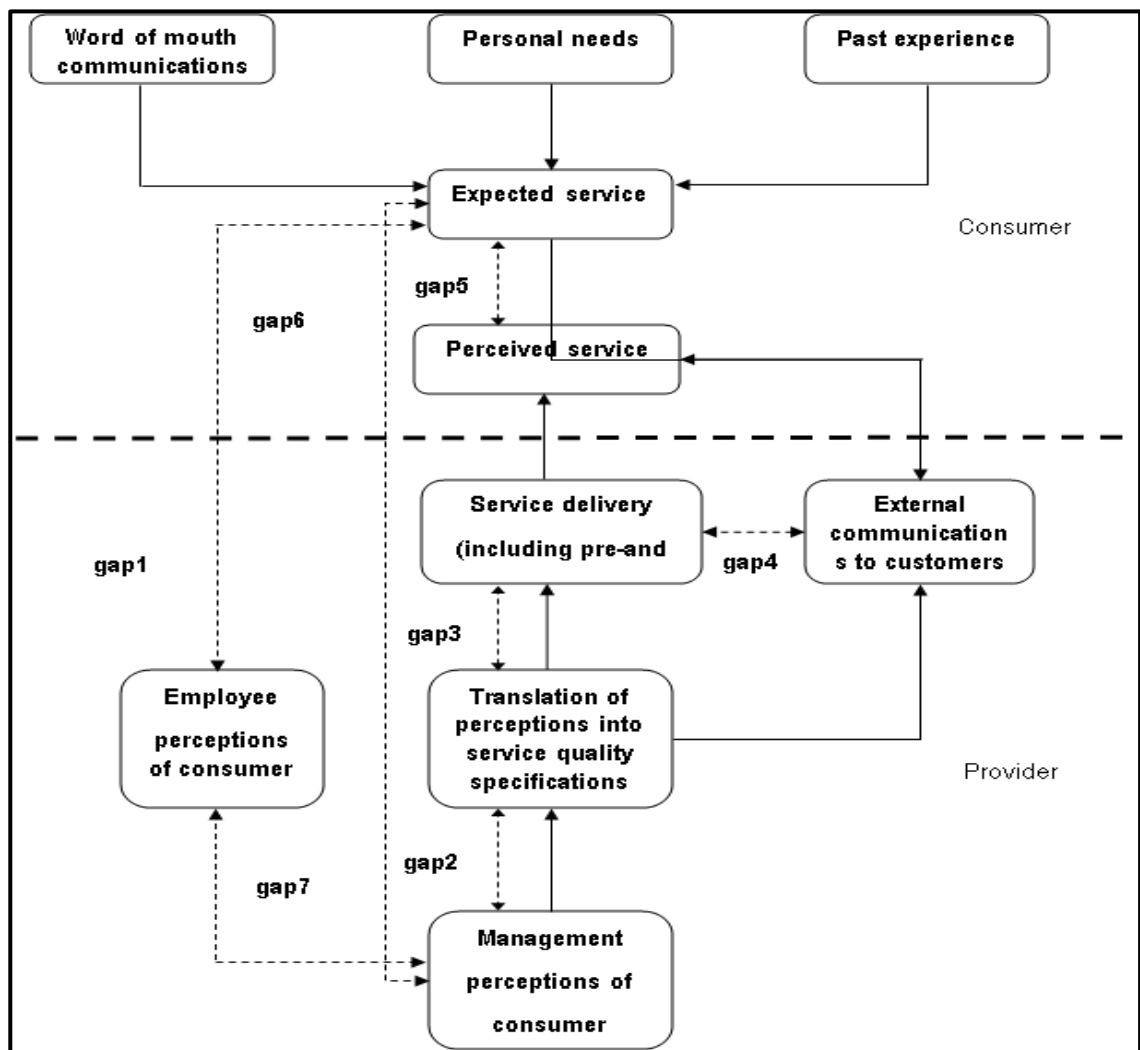


Figure 1. Model of service quality gaps. Source: Parasuraman et al., 1985c

According to Brown and Bond (1995), the gap model is one of the best accepted and most heuristically constructive contributions to the services literature. The model identifies seven key discrepancies or gaps relating to managerial perceptions of service quality, and tasks associated with service delivery to customers. Shahin, (2004), identified the Gaps in Gaps model as follows:

“Gap1: Customers’ expectations versus management perceptions: as a result of the lack of a marketing research orientation, inadequate upward communication and too many layers of management.

Gap2: Management perceptions versus service specifications: As a result of an insufficient commitment to service quality, a perception of unfeasibility, in (Brown & Bond, 1995) adequate task standardisation and an absence of goal setting.

Gap3: Service specifications versus service delivery: As a result of role ambiguity and conflict, poor employee-job fit and poor technology-job fit, inappropriate supervisory control systems, lack of perceived control and lack of teamwork.

Gap4: Service delivery versus external communication: As a result of inadequate horizontal communications and propensity to over-promise.

Gap5: The discrepancy between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered: As a result of the influences exerted from the customer side and the shortfalls (gaps) on the part of the service provider. In this case, customer expectations are influenced by the extent of personal needs, word of mouth recommendation and past service experiences.

Gap6: The discrepancy between customer expectations and employees' perceptions: as a result of the differences in the understanding of customer expectations by front-line service providers.

Gap7: The discrepancy between employee perceptions and management attitudes: as a result of the differences in the understanding of customer expectations between managers and service providers.”

The formation of the gap model by Parasuraman et al., (1985), opened new horizons to the understanding of service quality. Moreover, the measurement of the gap between customers' expectation of service and perception of service received, (gap 5), led to a frequently used and highly debated service quality instrument called the SERVQUAL scale that is discussed further on in this chapter. Parasuraman et al., (1985), argued that the most important gap is between customers' expectations of service and their perception of the service, (gap 5). The other four gaps (1, 2, 3 and 4) are the major causes of gap 5. Thus, firms should try to close or narrow down the other four gaps first to manage gap 5.

Benefits of measuring service quality

Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, (2014), pointed out that quality assurance, service quality, and customer service are driving influences in the business community, and higher education institutions have to tussle to gain a competitive advantage in terms of service excellence. The authors maintained that service excellence has numerous benefits, and the need for service quality management and measurement is reflected in the growth in student numbers and the high number of South African private

higher education institutions spread across the following provinces: Gauteng Western Cape , KwaZulu-Natal , Eastern Cape , North West , Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

Raphael, (2014), quoted Asuboneng et al., (1996), whose work argued that due to intense competition and hostility of environmental factors, service quality has become a cornerstone strategy for almost all organizations whose core business is providing services. This means that service based companies are being compelled to provide excellent services to their customers to have a sustainable competitive advantage. Asuboneng et al., (1996 as cited in Raphael, 2014) asserts that there is a need for these organizations to understand what service quality is in order to attain their objectives.

Mohanty and Lakhe, (2008), mentioned that there is a need for service quality measurement at various levels in the organization. They also noted that measurement of service quality is important in the quality improvement process because it provides feedback about the type of service provided and the extent to which it meets customer needs. The authors further explain that measuring service quality can have the benefits of creating a basis for assessing the degree of customer satisfaction so that necessary actions can be initiated to improve the process through which service is offered and that measuring service quality provides the right motivation for better performance by suppliers, vendors, departments, and organization units.

Models for Measuring Service Quality

There are various service quality models, this section attempts to mention a few models used to measure service quality in the higher education sector:

SERVQUAL

According to Parasuraman et al., (1985,1988,1991 as cited in Dado et al., 2011), service quality is an elusive and indistinct construct, which cannot be measured in an objective manner like product quality. What makes it difficult to define and measure service quality is the very essence of services, i.e. intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption as their main characteristics, (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Empirical studies, conducted by Parasuraman et al., (1985), resulted in the SERVQUAL model, a 22-item scale for measuring service quality along five dimensions, those being reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. The construct of service quality, as measured by SERVQUAL, involves perceived service quality, which originators of the scale define as “the consumer’s judgment about an entity’s overall excellence or superiority” (Parasuraman et al., 1988), adding further that “it is a form of attitude, related but not equivalent to satisfaction”, which results from a comparison of perceived performance and expectations. Due to its intuitive and appealing notion, some studies conducted across a wide spectrum of service industries have also invoked the SERVQUAL framework. According to Parasuraman et al., (1988 as cited in Tan & Kek, 2004), SERVQUAL measures the difference between what is expected from a service encounter and the perception of the actual service encounter.

The disconfirmation paradigm is functionalized as:

SERVICE QUALITY (Q) = Perception (P) - Expectation (E)

$$\mathbf{Q = P - E}$$

The SERVQUAL instrument is a survey form containing 22 items, each item measuring both the perception and the expectation of a service attribute. SERVQUAL is widely used as an off-the-shelf instrument in many service settings. In education, it has been significantly adapted to form LibQUAL, which is used to measure academic library service quality, (Cook & Thompson, 2000).

SERVPERF

Cronin and Taylor, (1992 as cited in Prasad & Jha, 2013), were the first to develop a theoretical justification for discarding the expectation segment of SERVQUAL and replaced it with a performance measure. They established the other instrument of measuring service quality on a different scale popularly called, SERVPERF, which consists of 22 items on the Likert scale.

Seth, Deshmukh, & Vart, (2005), cited the authors Cronin and Taylor, (1992)'s work, where they investigated the conceptualization and measurement of service quality and its relationship with consumer satisfaction and purchase intentions. They compared computed difference scores with perception to conclude that perceptions only are a better predictor of service quality. They argued on the framework of Parasuraman et al., (1985), concerning conceptualization and measurement of service quality.

Cronin and Taylor, (1992 as cited in Seth et al., 2005), maintained that the performance only measure of service quality is an enhanced means of measuring service quality. They argued that SERVQUAL confounds satisfaction and attitude.

They stated that service quality can be conceptualized as “similar to an approach”, and that Performance, instead of, “Performance-Expectation”, determines service quality. Service quality is evaluated by perceptions only without expectations and without importance weights according to the formula:

$$SQ = \sum_{j=1}^k P_{ij}$$

Where:

SQ = overall service quality;

k = the number of attributes;

P_{ij} = performance perception of stimulus *i* with respect to attribute *j*.

HedPERF

Firdaus, (2005), proposed HEdPERF (Higher Education PERFormance-only), a new and more comprehensive performance-based measuring scale that attempts to capture the authentic determinants of service quality within the higher education sector. The 41-item instrument has been empirically tested for unidimensionality, reliability, and validity using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Therefore, the primary question is directed at the measurement of the service quality construct within a single, empirical study, utilising customers of a single industry, namely higher education. Specifically, the ability of the more concise, HEdPERF scale, is compared with that of two alternatives namely, the SERVPERF instrument and the merged, HEdPERF-SERVPERF, as a moderating scale. The goal is to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of each instrument, in order to determine which instrument has the superior measurement capability in terms of unidimensionality,

reliability, validity and better explains the variance of service quality. Eventually, the results of this comparative study were used to refine the HEdPERF scale, transforming it into an ideal measuring instrument of service quality for the higher education sector.

Summary

The studies reviewed in this section show that there are various definitions and terminologies to the different aspects of the service quality topic. The chapter discusses the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, a proper explanation of the SERVQUAL model is outlined in this chapter. The various dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy of the SERVQUAL model is discussed. This study will adopt the SERVQUAL model in the methodology section.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

An analysis of the previous studies in chapter two, provided guidance for this research. Chapter three is focused on the research methodology used to obtain students' perceptions on service quality at the Namibia Business School, the chapter covers the following sections: research design, population, sample, sampling design, procedure, data analyses and the chapter concludes with a coverage of the ethical issues concerning the research.

3.1 Rationale of the methodology

This study used the quantitative research method to examine students' perception of service at the Namibia Business School, (NBS). The quantitative research method emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data and it entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which theory is tested, (Bryman & Bell, 2007). According to Morgan, (2014), quantitative research produces broadly applicable information through well-controlled procedures with larger numbers of cases. This method is used because it is suitable in answering the research objectives and permits the measure of variables derived from the

SERVQUAL model adequately. It is also good in evaluating the differences between students in terms of measuring their perceptions on service quality at NBS.

3.2 Research Design

According to Nooshinfard, Nemati-Anaraki, Zikmund, Babin, & Griffin, (2012), a research design is a grand plan of approach to a research topic and it is a process that is required to answer the research questions. This study is of the quantitative nature, and it used descriptive techniques to evaluate the data and reach a conclusion. A questionnaire was used for collecting data. Participants answered questions on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed according to the SERVQUAL model methods. The data gathered through questionnaires was used to measure students' perceptions and expectations of the five dimensions of service that consists of assurance, responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and tangibles. The quality gap of educational services was used to determine the differences between students' perceptions and expectations.

3.3 Population

The problem statement guides the population of the research. The term “population” in research refers to a collective term used to describe the total quantity of cases of the type, which are the subject of a study, (Walliman, 2011). This study included all the students registered at NBS for the academic year 2013; these are students registered for the three postgraduate programmes offered at the school. The total population size consisted of N= 228 participants. The study did not include students that were participating in the short term training programmes offered by the NBS, as well as students that are doing executive education courses. These programmes are

offered on a short time basis, and the study was only focused on programmes that ran on a long-term where students would have been engaged with the school for a longer period and these students had completed at least one year with the NBS. First year students were not considered, as they were new to the institution and would not have spent enough time to develop a perception of the service quality.

3.4 Sample

The study made use of a probability simple random sampling technique, the researcher selected participants for the sample so that any individual has an equal probability of being selected from the population. The researcher to assigned a number to each individual in the population and then used a random numbers table for the sample. For this procedure the researcher used a list of the students in the target population and a number was assigned to each student. The researcher opted for this method because it authorises sampling error estimation, reduces bias in the sample or sampling, and makes it possible for the researcher to use inferential statistics correctly. Furthermore, this method was preferred because it gave equal chance to all students to be included in the sample of the study. Thus, the sample size was half of the population size ($n = 114$ participants). However, only 100 questionnaires were -completed.

3.5 Research Instrument

Primary data collection was derived from questionnaires, administered to the NBS students. The study used the SERVQUAL model sample questionnaire that focused on 5 dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy),

which are subdivided into 22 statements, which were directed to measuring service quality at the NBS.

The SERVQUAL model questionnaire is divided into two parts, the first part aims to measure the expectations of customers, (students), and the second part aims to measure their perceptions. Service quality expectations and perceptions were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree.' There is also a demographic part that provides general information about respondents, on age, gender and the programme they are registered for.

A pilot study was administered to a group of ten, (10), respondents within the population. This was to identify whether the questionnaire was able to obtain the required data and to find out whether the questionnaire was easily understandable as well as whether there were any vague and confusing questions in the questionnaire.

3.6 Administration of the questionnaire

Firstly, the questionnaire was discussed with the supervisor before distribution. The content of the questionnaire was carefully explained and reviewed with the students and all queries were dealt with before handing it out to the respondents. The researcher explained to all the respondents that the study aimed to measure the gap between what they want from the NBS in terms of service quality and what they perceive in terms of service quality offered by the NBS. The researcher highlighted to each respondent on ethical issues, such as their rights, privacy and confidentiality of information during the data collection process.

3.7 Coding

The SERVQUAL model dimensions are the key variables used in this study and the researcher coded the dimensions to ease the analysis of data collected. The coding technique was adapted from the works of Daniel and Berinyuy, (2010), who created similar codes for a study on service quality and customer satisfaction at grocery stores. Since the study aims to examine the perceptions and expectations of students on service quality, in the results chapter the codes beginning with an **E** of a coded variable will represent the *Expectations* aspect of the questionnaire and the codes beginning with a **P** will represent the *Perceptions* aspect of the questionnaire. See Appendix 2 for the list of coded SERVQUAL dimensions.

3.8 Data Analysis

The researcher used the SERVQUAL model to analyse the data collected. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to evaluate and analyse the data obtained. The means were used to compare the students' perceptions and expectations of educational service quality and the gap between them at the NBS. All the data was coded and analysed using the open-source, Statistical Software **R** version 3.2.

3.8 Research Ethics

According to Creswell, (2012), ethical reporting and writing research needs to be honestly reported, shared with participants, not previously published, not plagiarized, not influenced by personal interests, and duly credited to authors that make a contribution. The participants for this study were made aware that they are taking part in the research and that the results thereof might be published. The questionnaires assured confidentiality. Special precautions were taken to ensure that

the data is stored appropriately to guarantee the participants' anonymity. Information collected was used for statistical purposes and not for any other purposes. Accordingly, the ideas borrowed from other scholars have been properly acknowledged. All the data gathered is being kept in a lockable cabinet and will be destroyed after 5 years.

3.9 Summary

This chapter dealt with the methodology employed in this study. The research approach and the method have been described and explained. The methods of sampling, data collection and questionnaire administration have been outlined. Finally, the need for ethical consideration when collecting data has also been explained.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This study is aimed at investigating students' perceptions of service quality at the Namibia Business School. This chapter presents and analyses information gathered from the questionnaires administered and completed by the 114 respondents at the Namibia Business School, as based on the research objectives.

This chapter is divided into the following sections: Section 4.1 Demographics - will present the Research Findings that will analyse the various interviews and questions distributed to the 100 respondents. Section 4.2 Test for Independence: Expectations and Perceptions. Section 4.3 Reliability Testing. Section 4.4 Data Summary.

4.1. Demographics

This study elicited responses from a 100 Namibia Business School, (NBS), students enrolled for various study programmes in the academic year 2013. From the 100 respondents, 54% were female, while 46% were male, (Figure 2). The majority (+/-

90%), of the respondents were registered for a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration, Master in Business Administration in Finance and Strategic Management. Less than 10% of the respondents were in the Master of Business Administration: Natural Resources, Doctor of Business Administration and Master of Business Administration: Entrepreneurship courses of study, (Figure 3).

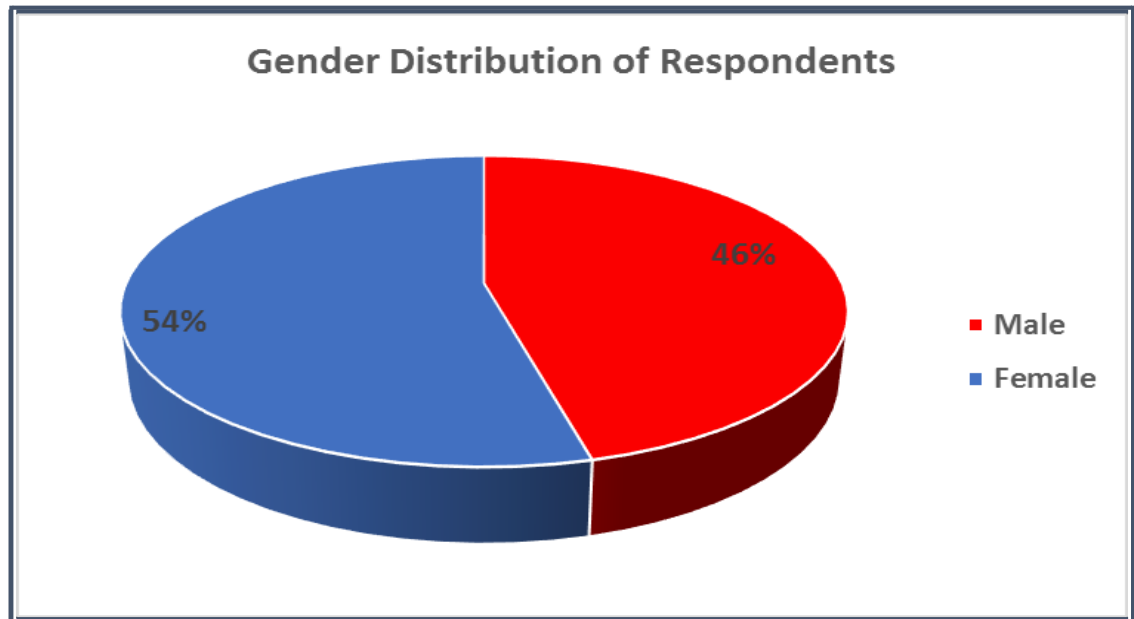


Figure 2: Gender distribution of Respondents

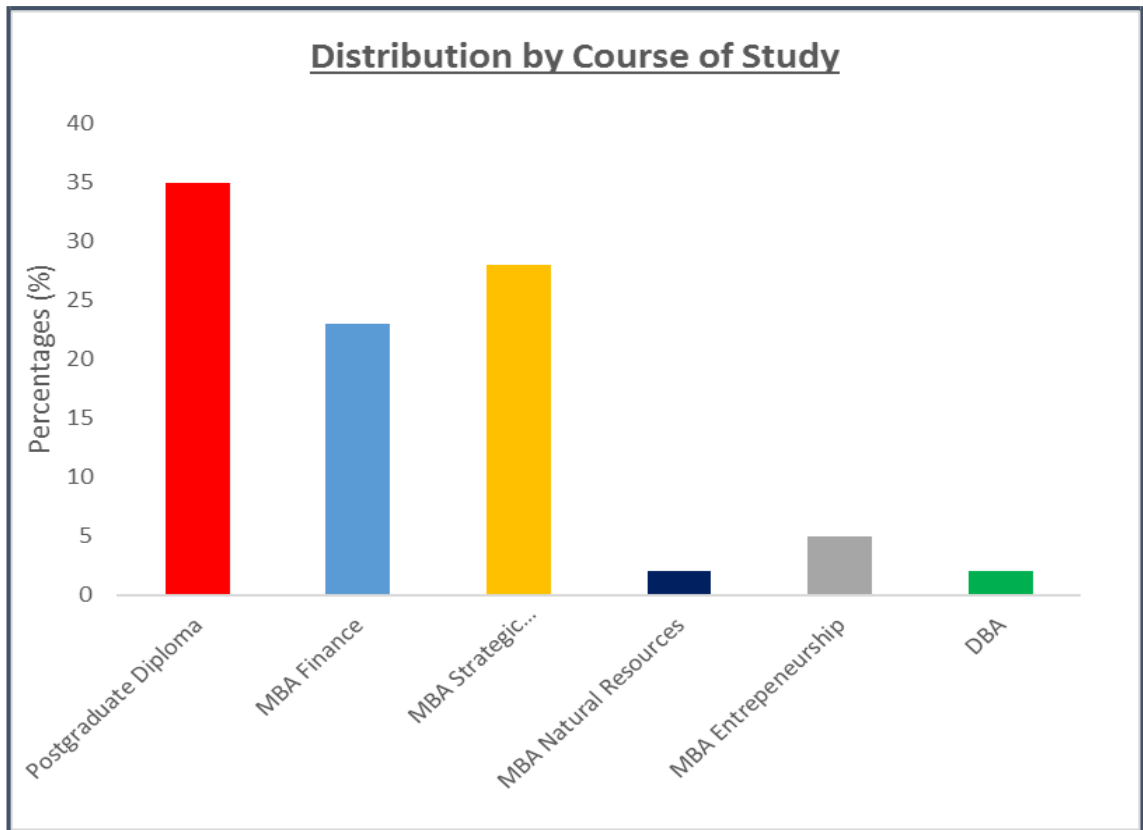


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by course of study

The bar-plot below shows the sex ratio (female: males) across the different course/fields of study. More women were enrolled for the Postgraduate Diploma (60:40) and MBA Finance (65:35). Furthermore, the sex-ratio was balanced for those enrolled for an MBA in Strategic Management while for the MBA (Entrepreneurship), as well as the DBA, more males enrolled.

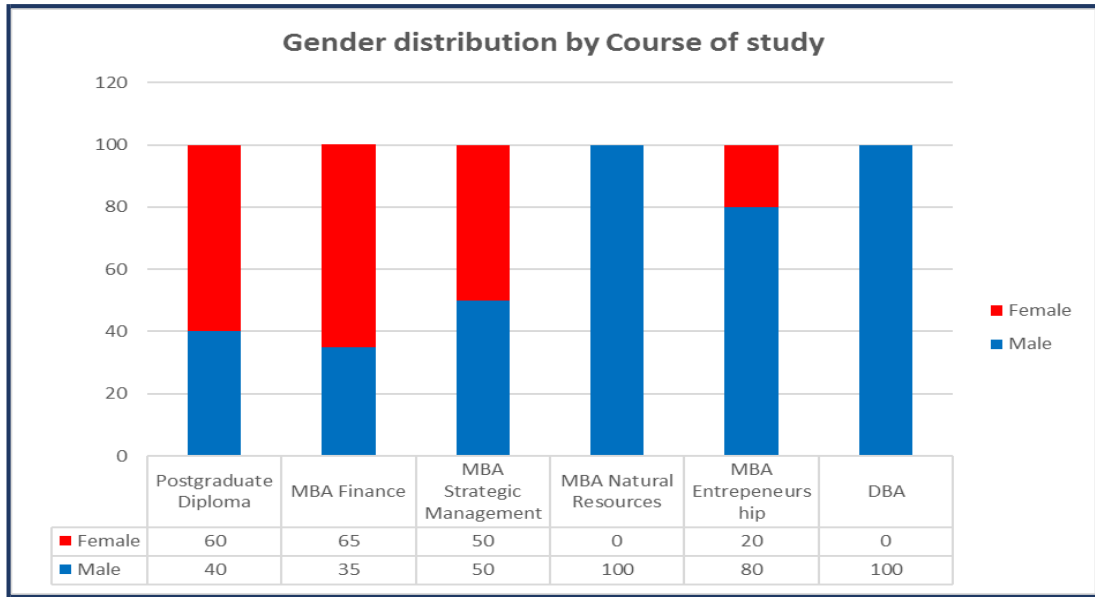


Figure 4: **Demographics**-Gender distribution by course of study

4.2 Test for Independence: Expectations and Perceptions

Welch Two Sample t-test of Independence		
	Expectations	Perceptions
Mean	4.266667	3.1999908
95% Confidence Interval (C.I)	1.004 - 1.129	
t=33.39, df ¹ =3931.1, p-value=<0.0001		
¹ degree of freedom		

Table 2: Test for independence of Expectations and Perceptions

A test of independence revealed that there is a significant difference across the board between expectations and perceptions.

4.3 Reliability testing

```

Reliability analysis
call: alpha(x = d, check.keys = T)

raw_alpha std.alpha G6(smc) average_r S/N ase mean sd
0.9 0.88 0.96 0.14 7.2 0.013 3.3 0.44

lower alpha upper 95% confidence boundaries
0.87 0.9 0.92

```

Figure 5: R output of Reliability analysis

A test for internal consistency of the model using Cronbach's alpha yielded a total reliability scale of 0.9 (95% C.I: 0.87 – 0.92) shown in figure 5 above. Cronbach Alpha ranges between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating a perfectly unreliable measurement and 1 being a perfectly reliable measurement. The total reliability scale for the study is 0.9, demonstrating an overall reliability aspect slightly like that of Parasuraman et al., (1988) which was 0.92. This reliability value for this study is extensive because the highest reliability that can be obtained is 1.0 and this is an indication that the items of the six dimensions of SERVQUAL model are accepted for analysis.

4.4 Data Summary

Table 3: Computed data summary (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis and standard error):

Expectations	N	Mean	SD	skew	kurtosis	se
ETA1	99	4.363636	0.76204	-1.25185	1.519734	0.076588

ETA2	98	4.265306	0.780576	-0.74814	-0.20853	0.07885
ETA3	100	4.29	0.890976	-1.10014	0.314903	0.089098
ETA4	100	4.42	0.767786	-1.52323	3.070236	0.076779
ERL1	99	4.323232	0.855096	-1.2412	1.370623	0.08594
ERL2	99	4.40404	0.668828	-0.86657	0.427751	0.06722
ERL3	99	4.212121	0.872163	-1.05639	0.937379	0.087656
ERL4	100	4.43	0.714284	-1.32011	1.928513	0.071428
ERL5	97	4.247423	0.790977	-0.70937	-0.33267	0.080312
ERN1	100	4.45	0.625631	-0.67073	-0.55993	0.062563
ERN2	99	4.343434	0.77145	-1.19027	1.952852	0.077534
ERN3	100	4.5	0.689019	-1.37568	1.847258	0.068902
ERN4	99	4.040404	1.087209	-1.1165	0.599037	0.109269
EAS1	99	4.343434	0.9276	-1.63116	2.512039	0.093227
EAS2	98	4.265306	0.891553	-1.31315	1.905435	0.09006
EAS3	98	4.102041	0.855423	-0.68194	-0.24382	0.086411
EAS4	99	4.272727	0.934794	-1.15092	0.64794	0.09395
EEM1	99	4.020202	0.989535	-0.79038	0.096188	0.099452
EEM2	99	4.191919	0.922251	-0.76865	-0.56675	0.09269
EEM3	98	3.836735	1.100083	-0.64443	-0.25311	0.111125
EEM4	98	4.346939	0.813571	-1.04063	0.270635	0.082183
EEM5	98	4.183673	0.956227	-1.13764	0.973303	0.096594
Perceptions	N	Mean	SD	skew	kurtosis	se
PTA1	99	2.858586	1.195315	0.270189	-0.94655	0.120134

PTA2	99	3.060606	1.141233	0.005242	-0.89796	0.114698
PTA3	99	3.575758	1.021113	-0.62987	0.138405	0.102626
PTA4	99	3.606061	1.086261	-0.41205	-0.65993	0.109173
PRL1	98	2.540816	1.168031	0.325221	-0.74949	0.117989
PRL2	99	3.060606	1.292191	-0.08321	-1.14253	0.12987
PRL3	99	2.616162	1.20125	0.375504	-0.692	0.12073
PRL4	99	2.767677	1.114178	0.197417	-0.68993	0.111979
PRL5	99	2.989899	1.233007	-0.04572	-0.88234	0.123922
PRN1	99	3.151515	1.256523	-0.19183	-0.94772	0.126285
PRN2	97	3.134021	1.304071	-0.2179	-1.05901	0.132408
PRN3	98	3.591837	1.101421	-0.75793	0.048167	0.111126
PRN4	98	3.265306	1.239812	-0.15262	-0.9668	0.12524
PAS1	99	3.313131	1.103302	-0.13615	-0.56949	0.110886
PAS2	99	3.626263	1.121095	-0.74361	-0.02811	0.112674
PAS3	99	3.555556	1.042194	-0.54773	-0.0645	0.104744
PAS4	99	3.535354	1.033255	-0.64305	-0.02825	0.103846
PEM1	99	3.262626	1.191688	-0.33093	-0.76528	0.119769
PEM2	98	3.306122	1.319233	-0.3282	-1.00344	0.133263
PEM3	98	3.27551	1.182175	-0.31558	-0.65417	0.119418
PEM4	99	3.181818	1.172505	-0.38904	-0.5612	0.117841
PEM5	99	3.121212	1.295776	-0.25076	-0.94458	0.13023

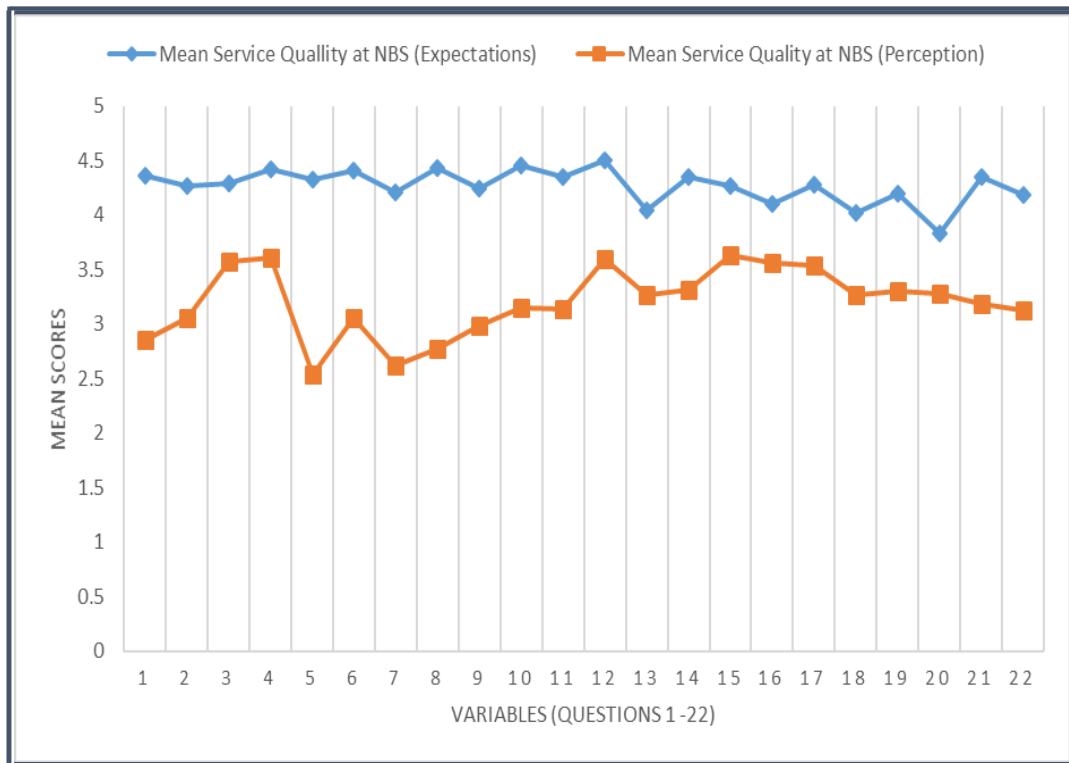


Figure 6: Mean service quality Expectations vs. Perceptions

The data was summarized in Table 3, and the means of the different variables was plotted in the line graph above. From line graph - Figure 6, it is evident that the scores for Expectations are higher than those for perceptions, with the gaps varying in magnitude between the different variables. Also, the Gap score which is the difference between perception and expectation is calculated in Table 4 (below) and was subsequently ranked according to the calculated wideness/gap. The Gap was wider for RL1 (ranked=1) and narrow for AS2 (ranked=22).

Table 4: Mean Service Quality of Perception and Expectations, Gap Score and ranking

Dimensions	Variables	Mean Service Quality at NBS (Perception)	Mean Service Quality at NBS (Expectations)	Gap Score (P-E)	Ranking
Tangibles	TA1	2.858585859	4.363636364	-1.5050505	4
	TA2	3.060606061	4.265306122	-1.2047001	9
	TA3	3.575757576	4.29	-0.7142424	19
	TA4	3.606060606	4.42	-0.8139394	15
Reliability	RL1	2.540816327	4.323232323	-1.782416	1
	RL2	3.060606061	4.404040404	-1.3434343	5
	RL3	2.616161616	4.212121212	-1.5959596	3
	RL4	2.767676768	4.43	-1.6623232	2
	RL5	2.98989899	4.24742268	-1.2575237	7
Responsiveness	RN1	3.151515152	4.45	-1.2984848	6
	RN2	3.134020619	4.343434343	-1.2094137	8
	RN3	3.591836735	4.5	-0.9081633	13
	RN4	3.265306122	4.04040404	-0.7750979	16
	RN5	3.313131313	4.343434343	-1.030303	12
Assurance	AS1	3.626262626	4.265306122	-0.6390435	20
	AS2	3.555555556	4.102040816	-0.5464853	22
	AS3	3.535353535	4.272727273	-0.7373737	18
	AS4	3.262626263	4.02020202	-0.7575758	17
Empathy	EM1	3.306122449	4.191919192	-0.8857967	14
	EM2	3.275510204	3.836734694	-0.5612245	21
	EM3	3.181818182	4.346938776	-1.1651206	10
	EM4	3.121212121	4.183673469	-1.0624613	11

Further summarizing the difference in the gaps by deliverable, it was found that the NBS was performing much better in the Assurance, Empathy and was modestly Responsive while they were falling short of expectations on the reliability and tangibles variables. The unweighted servqual score was -1.044; this will be interpreted in the discussion section. The different variables will be dealt with in the subsequent section.

Table 5: Mean score by deliverable, ranking, and Unweighted ServQual score

Deliverables	Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Mean Score	-1.059483096	-1.528331372	-1.044292557	-0.670119563	-0.918650794
Ranking	2	1	3	5	4
Unweighted ServQual Score	-1.044175476				

4.5 PROPORTION OF RESPONSES TO EXPECTATION QUESTIONS

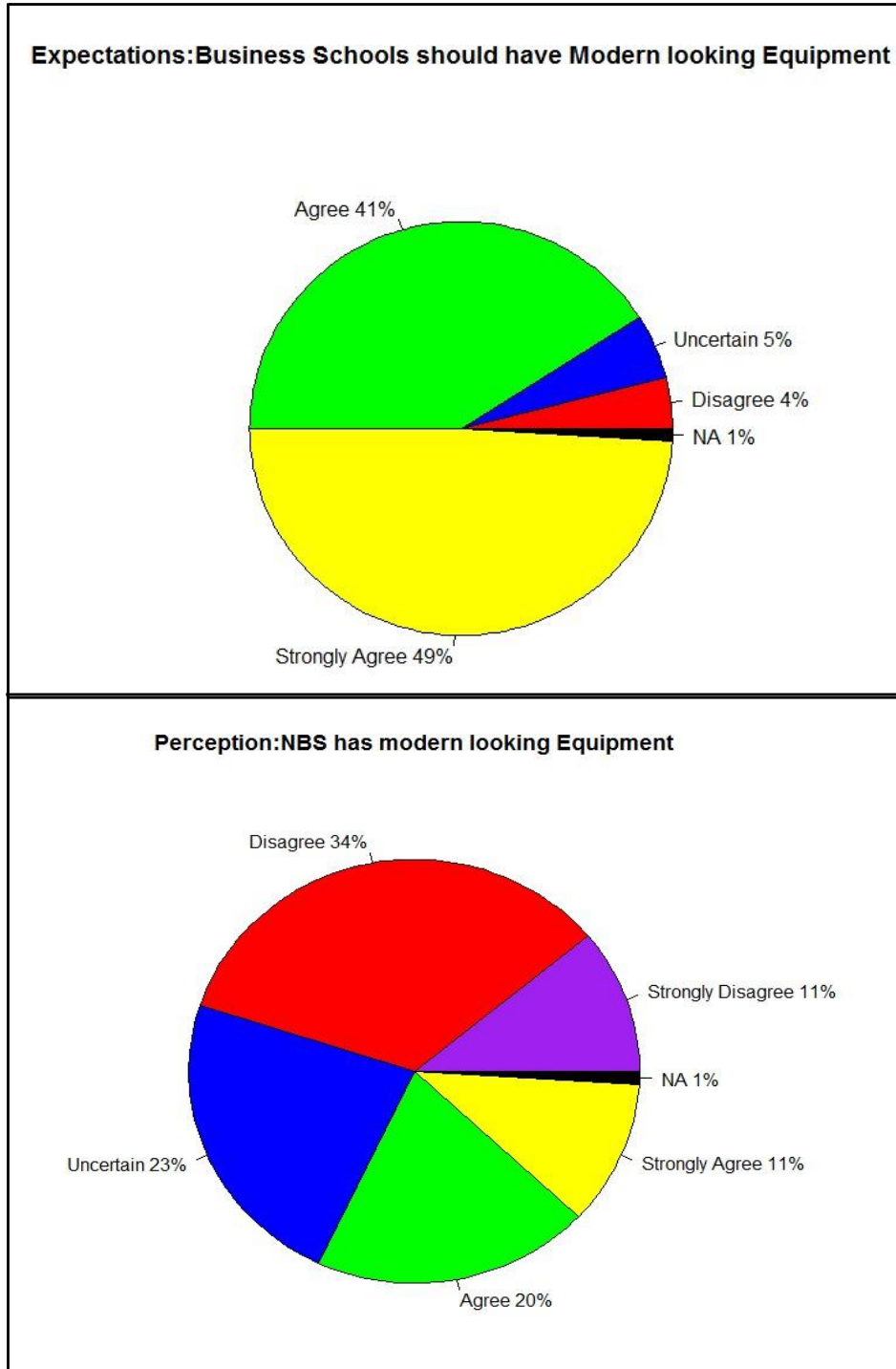
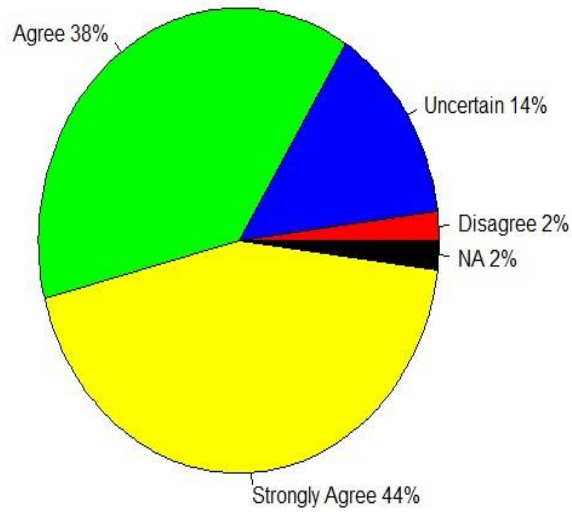


Figure 7: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived ownership of modern looking equipment

When asked whether the equipment at NBS had the modern looking equipment or whether they expected the equipment to be modern looking, 90% of the individuals strongly agreed or agreed

that the equipment should be modern looking. On the other hand, only about 1/3 (31%) of them participants combined strongly agreed and agreed that the equipment is modern looking, with 23% being uncertain and about half (45%) of the participants disagreeing that NBS does not have the modern looking equipment.

Expectations:Physical facilities at excellent Business school will be visually appealing



Perception:NBS physical facilities are visually appealing

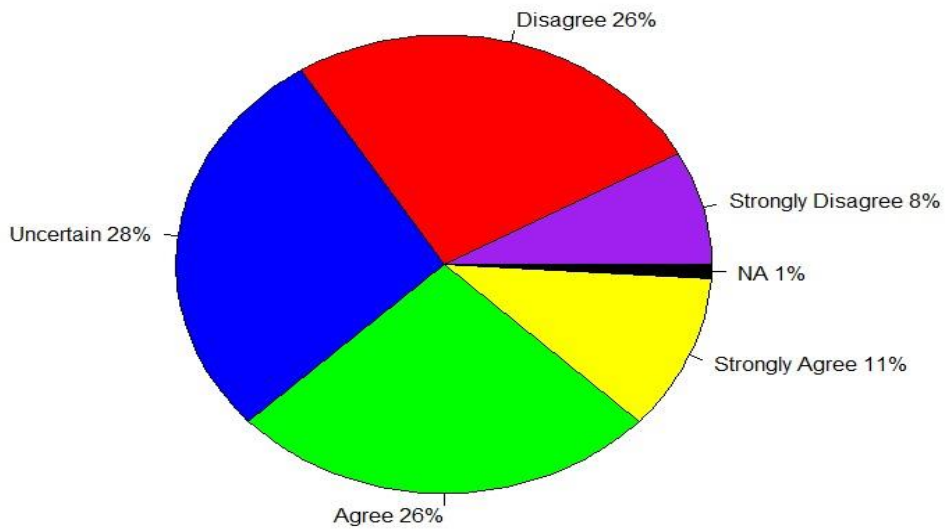


Figure 8: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived visual attractiveness of physical facilities

To elicit a response to whether the physical facilities at excellent business schools will be visually appealing. 82% of the participants expected the physical facilities to be visually appealing but only 37% perceived the physical facilities to be visually appealing, 28% are uncertain while 34% disagreed that it's visually appealing.

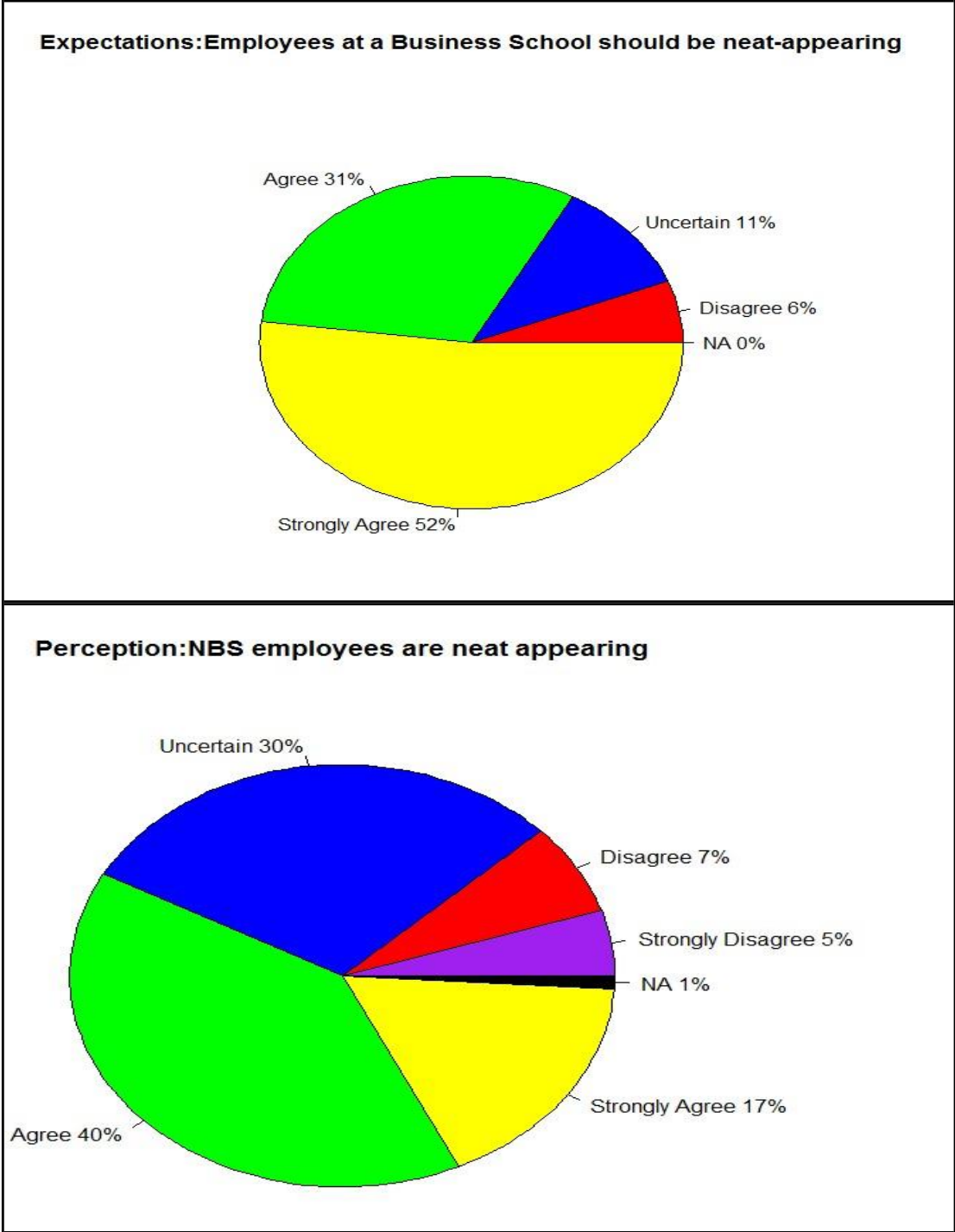


Figure 9: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived appearance of NBS employees

The answer to the question on whether employees at NBS are neat-appearing, there is over 80% agreement that they expected employees to be neat appearing. The perception is that 57% of the employees are neat appearing, while 30% were uncertain and 12% disagreed that they are neat-appearing.

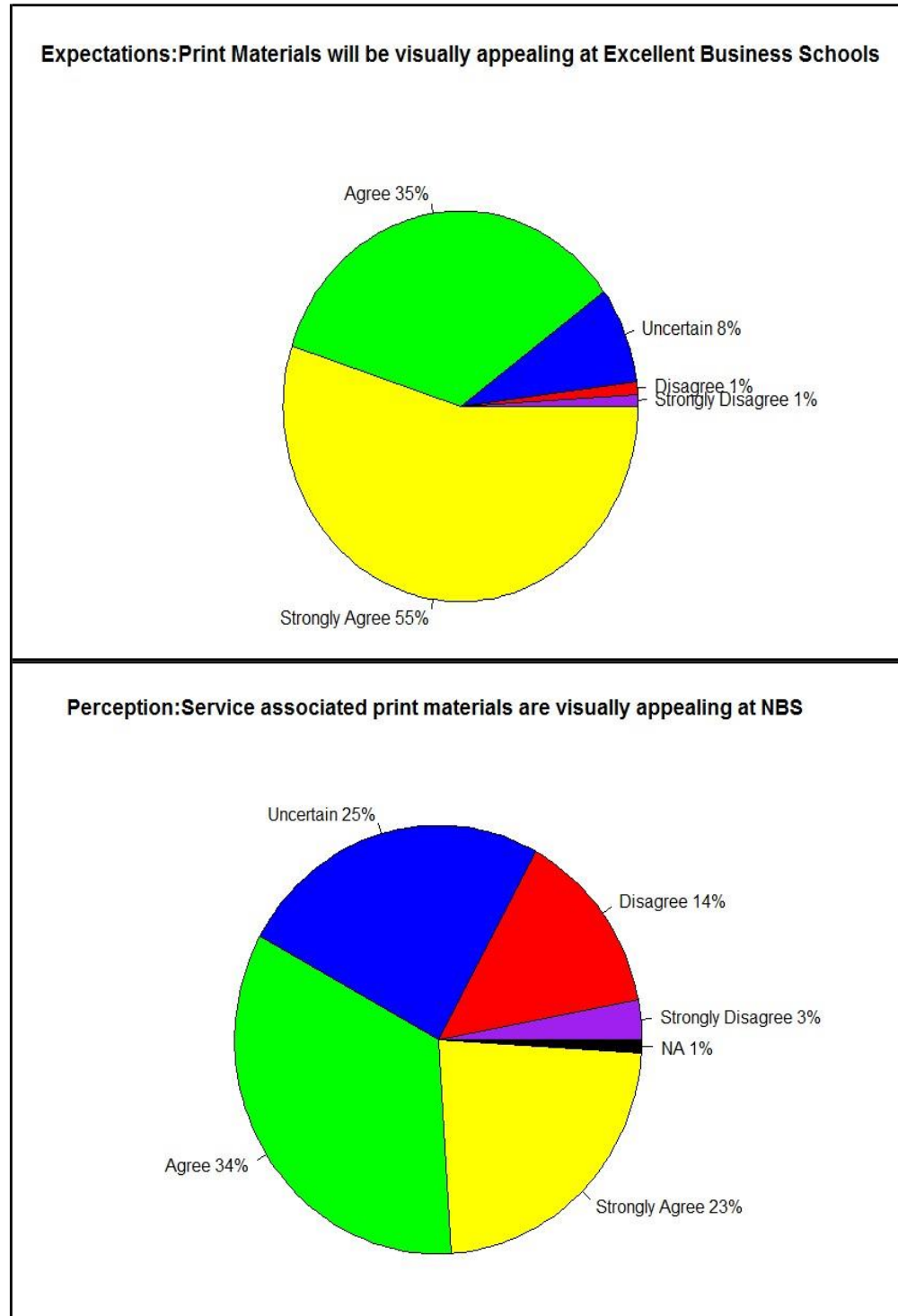
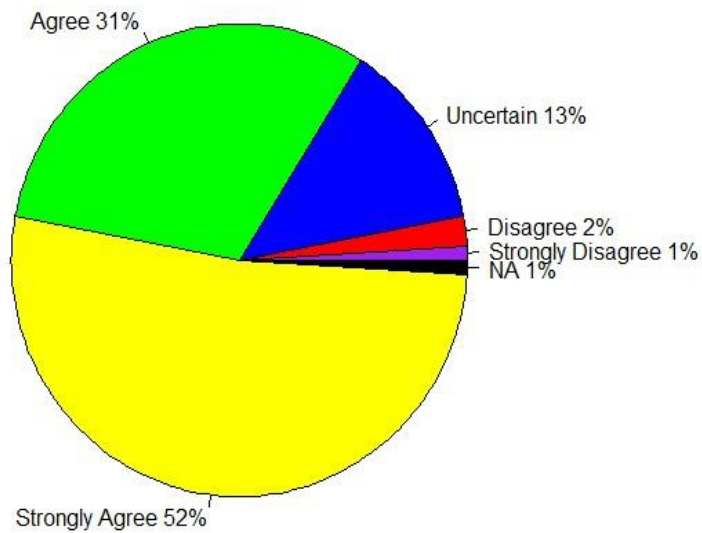


Figure 10: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived attractiveness of print materials

The question on whether the Print material was visually appealing elicited the responses shown in figure 9 above for both Expectations and Perceptions. By the responses, 90% of the respondents expected the material to be visually appealing, while only 57% found the material to be visually appealing and 25% were uncertain, with the remaining 17% disagreeing.

Expectations:Excellent Business Schools deliver on their promises timeously



Perception:NBS completes their promised tasks within a given time-frame

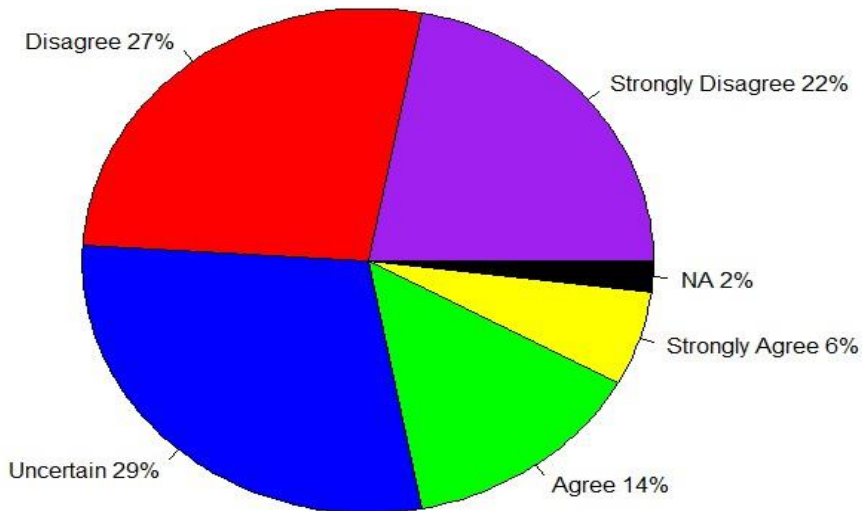


Figure 11: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived timeous delivery on promised tasks

For the information on whether excellent Business schools delivered on their promises in a timeous manner, 83 percent agreed that they expected the business school to deliver on their promises in a timeous manner. However, the perception was that only 20% agreed that NBS delivers on their promises in a timeous manner.

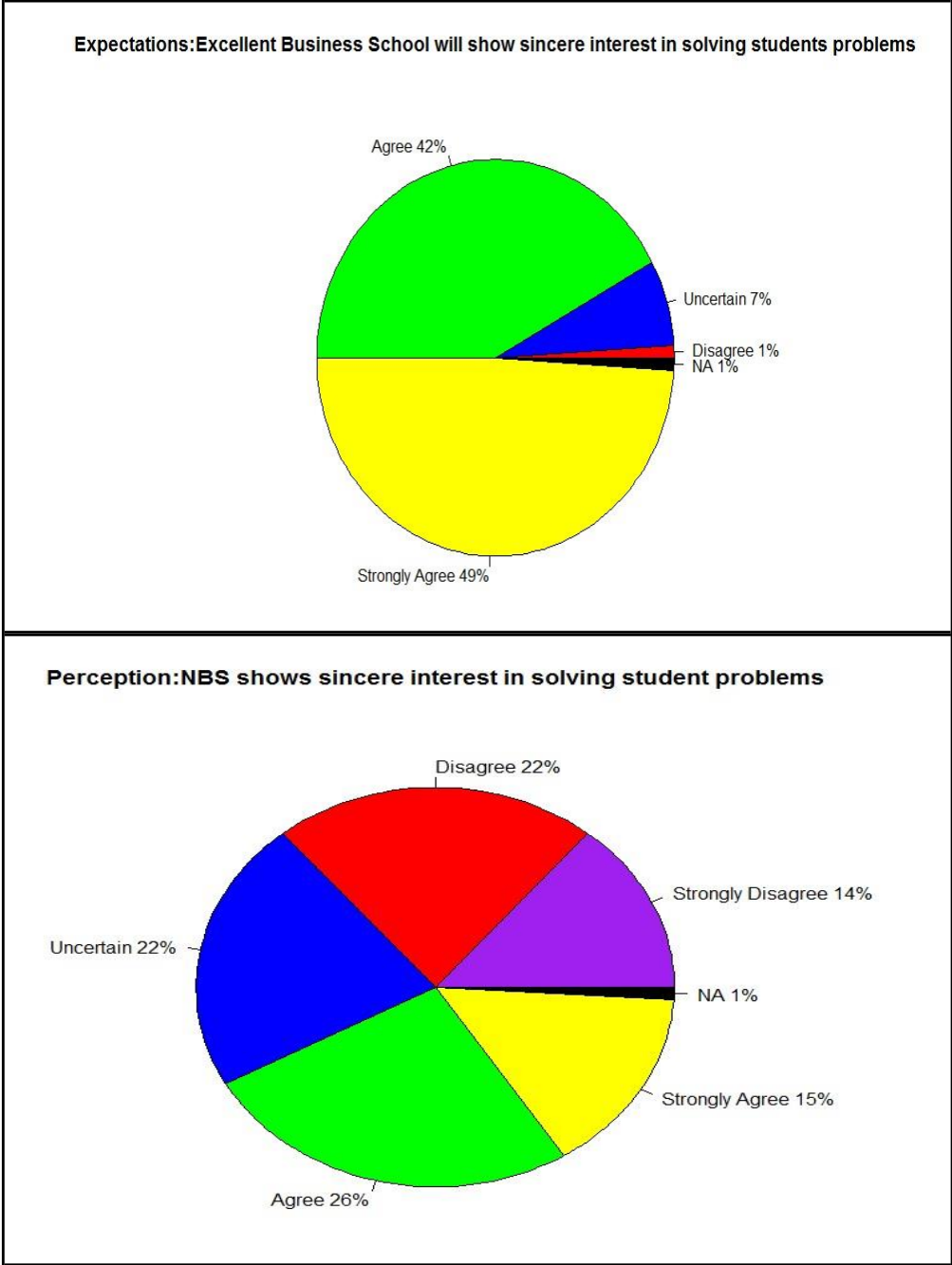


Figure 12: Pie charts comparing the proportions of the Expected and Perceived sincerity of NBS in solving students problems

An inquiry into whether excellent business schools will show sincere interest in solving student problems found that 80% of the respondents expect the business school to show genuine interest in solving student problems. On the other hand, only 41% agreed that NBS shows sincere interest in solving student problems.

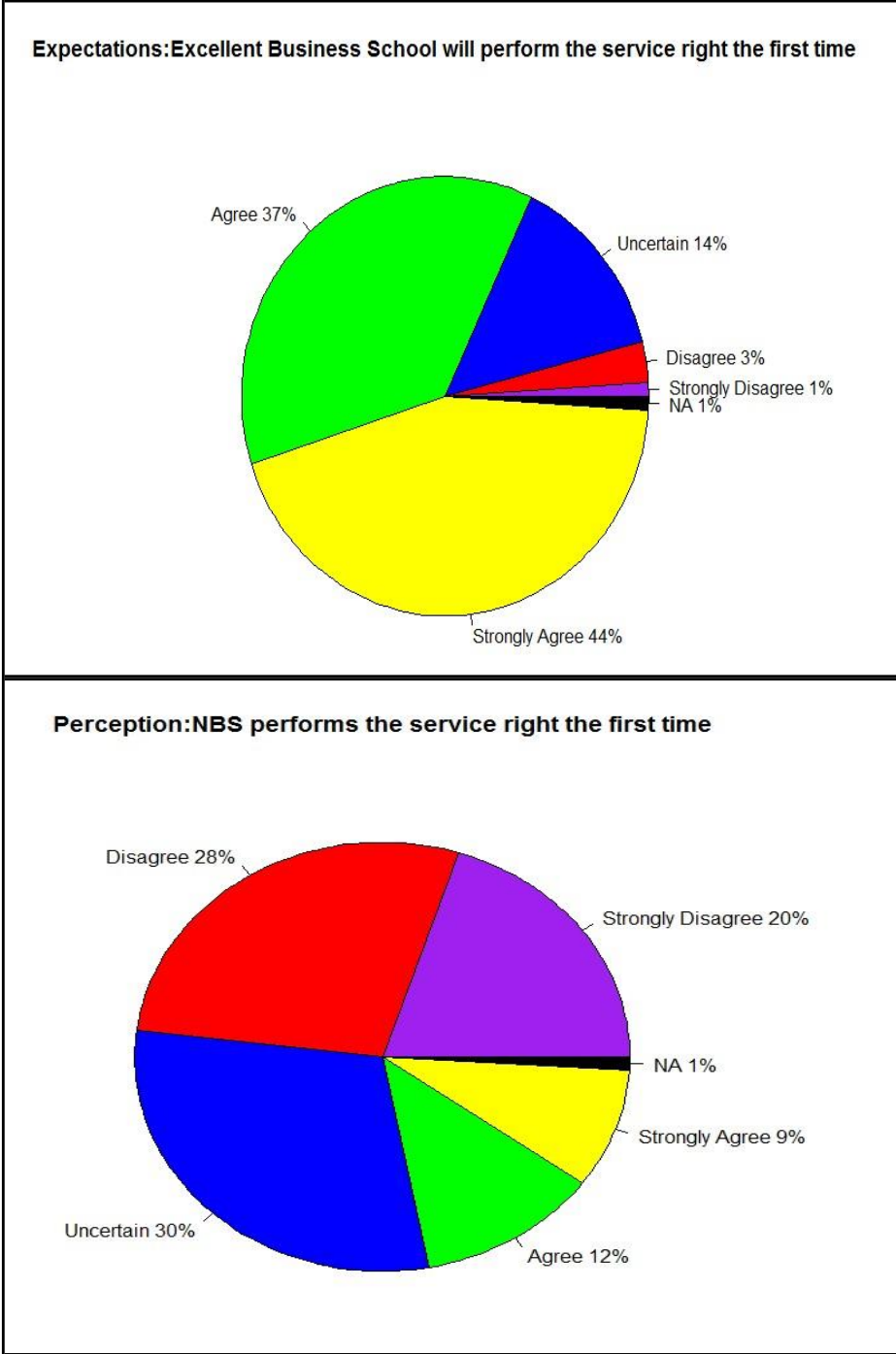


Figure 13: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived ability of NBS to perform services right the first time

On whether excellent business school will perform service right the first time, 81% expected service to be performed right the first time. Conversely, 9% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 12% agreed, giving a combined 21% of those that agreed that NBS performed their services right the first time.

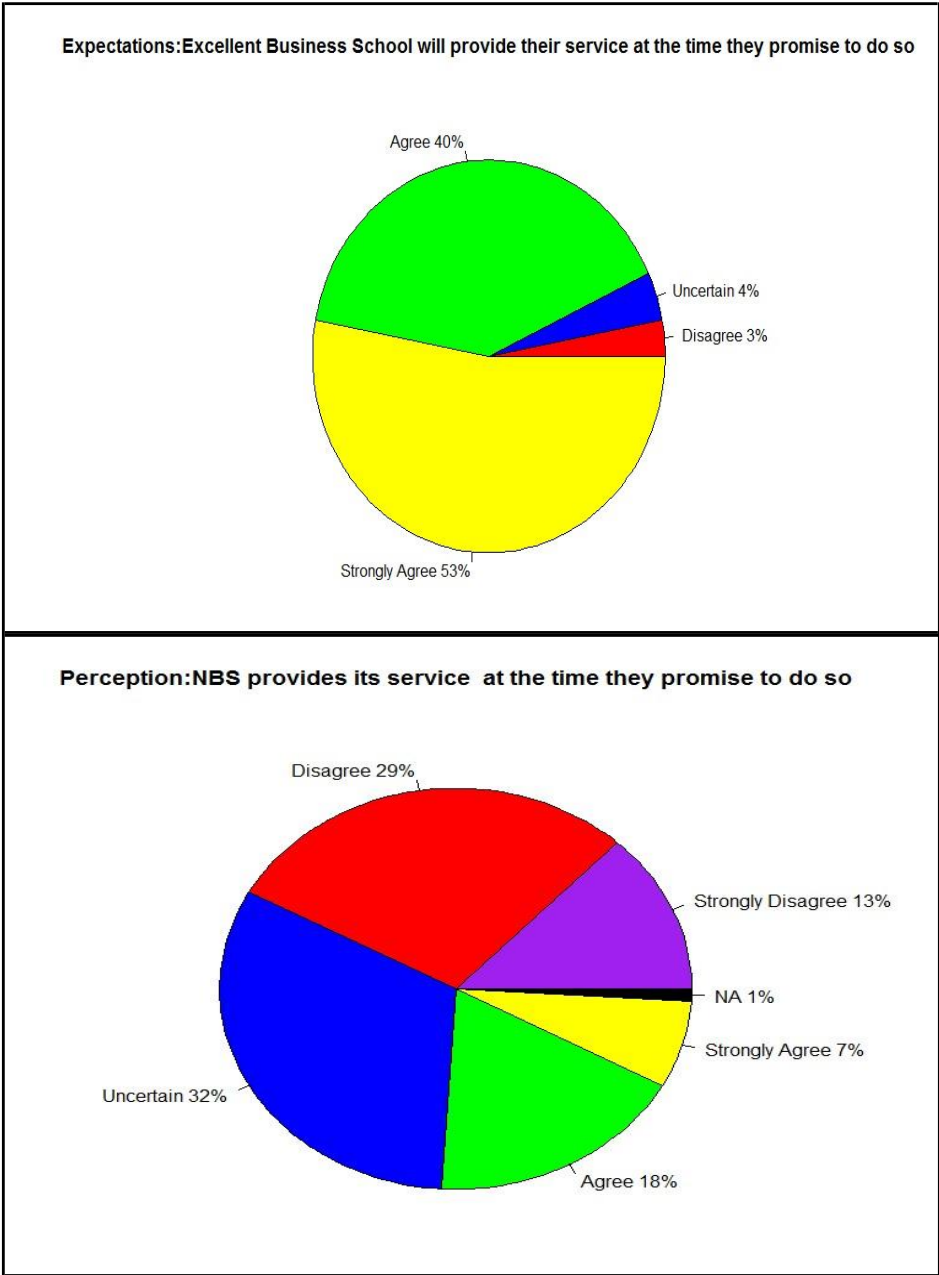


Figure 14: Pie charts comparing the responses to the Expected and Perceived ability of NBS to provide service to the students at the time they promised

A question into whether excellent the business schools will submit their services at the time they promised, 83% were of the expectation that services will be provided at the time they promised to do so. Only 25% of the respondents were of the perception that NBS provides its service at the time they promised to do so.

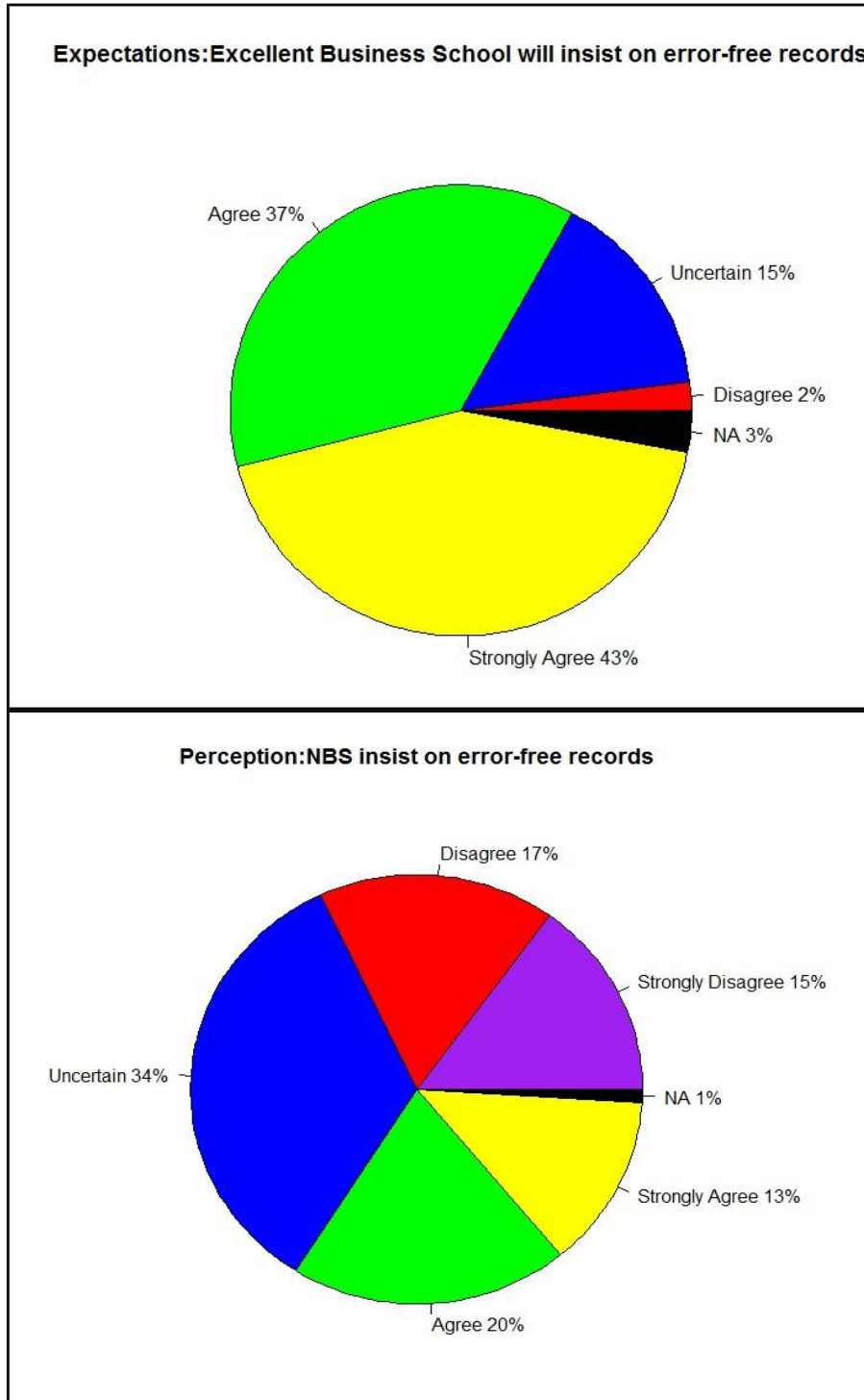
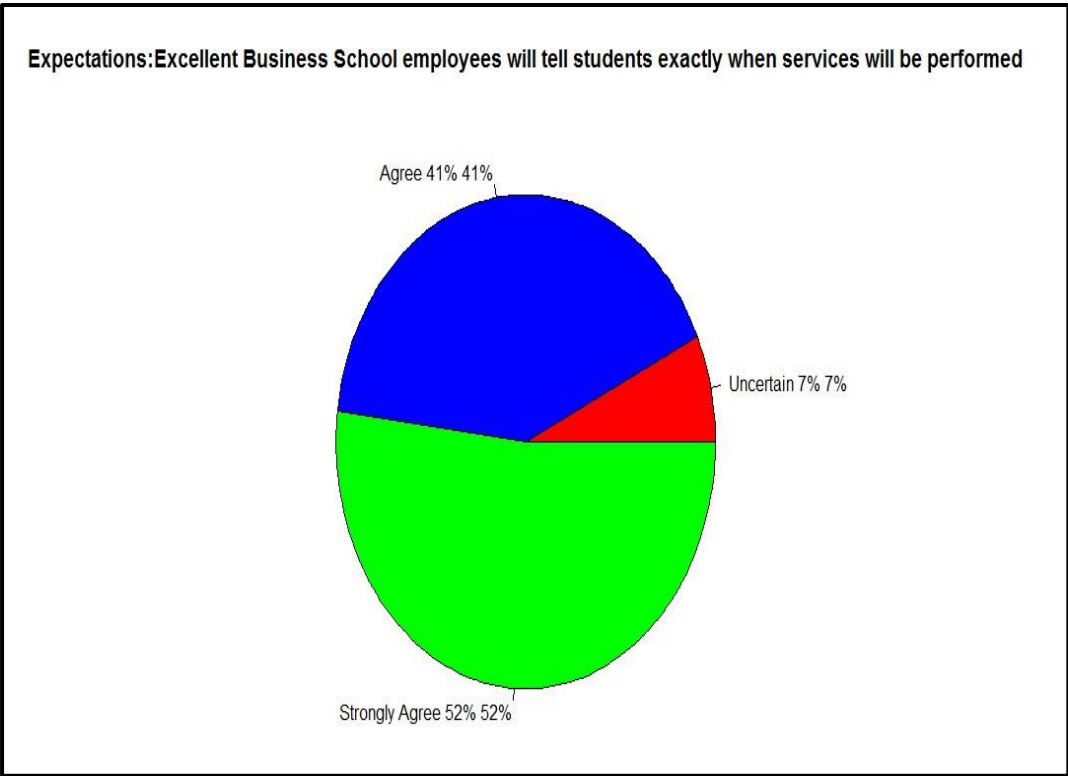


Figure 15: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived extent to which NBS insists on error-free records

In seeking whether excellent business school insists on error-free records, the majority (80%) agreed that they expect excellent business schools to insist on error-free records. The perception, on the other hand, was that only 33% agreed that NBS insists on error-free records, 34% uncertain and 17% disagreed, and 15% strongly disagreed.



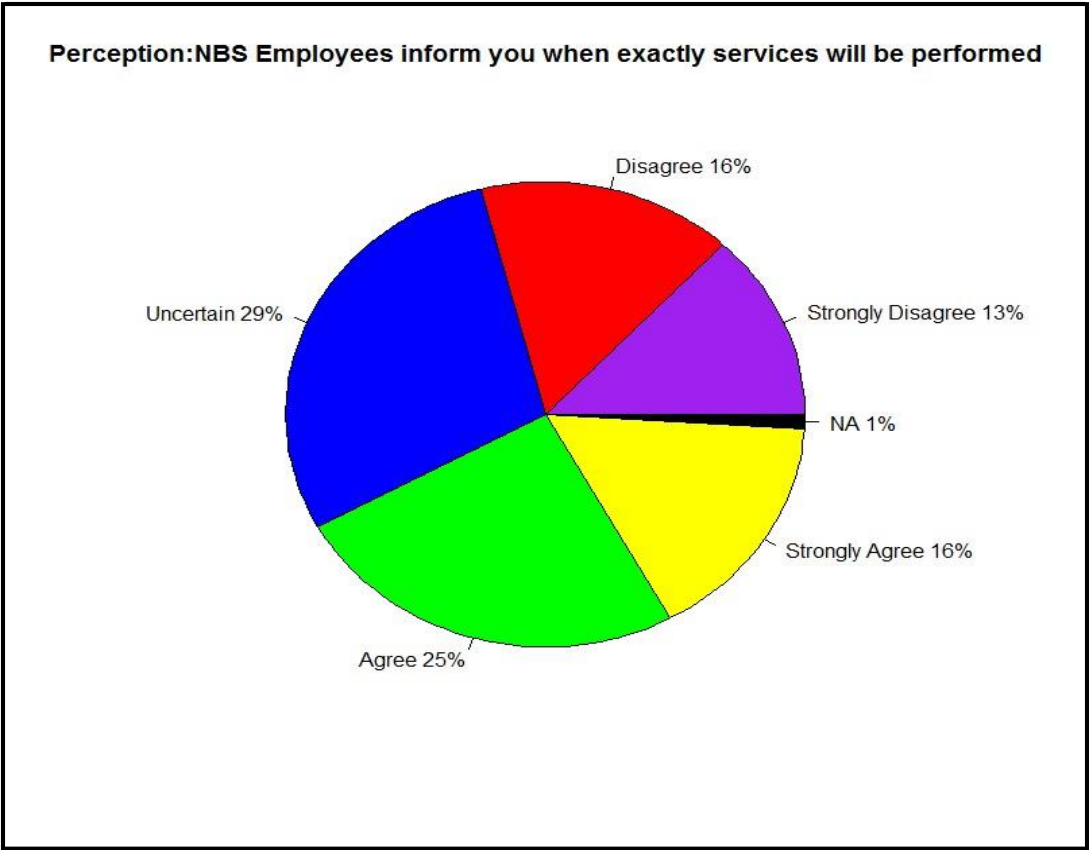


Figure 16: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived communication on exact services will be performed

The majority (93%) of the respondents are of the expectation that an excellent business school will communicate to them exactly when services will be performed. The following were the elicited responses on whether it was communicated to them on when exactly services will be performed: 16% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 29% uncertain, 16% disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed.

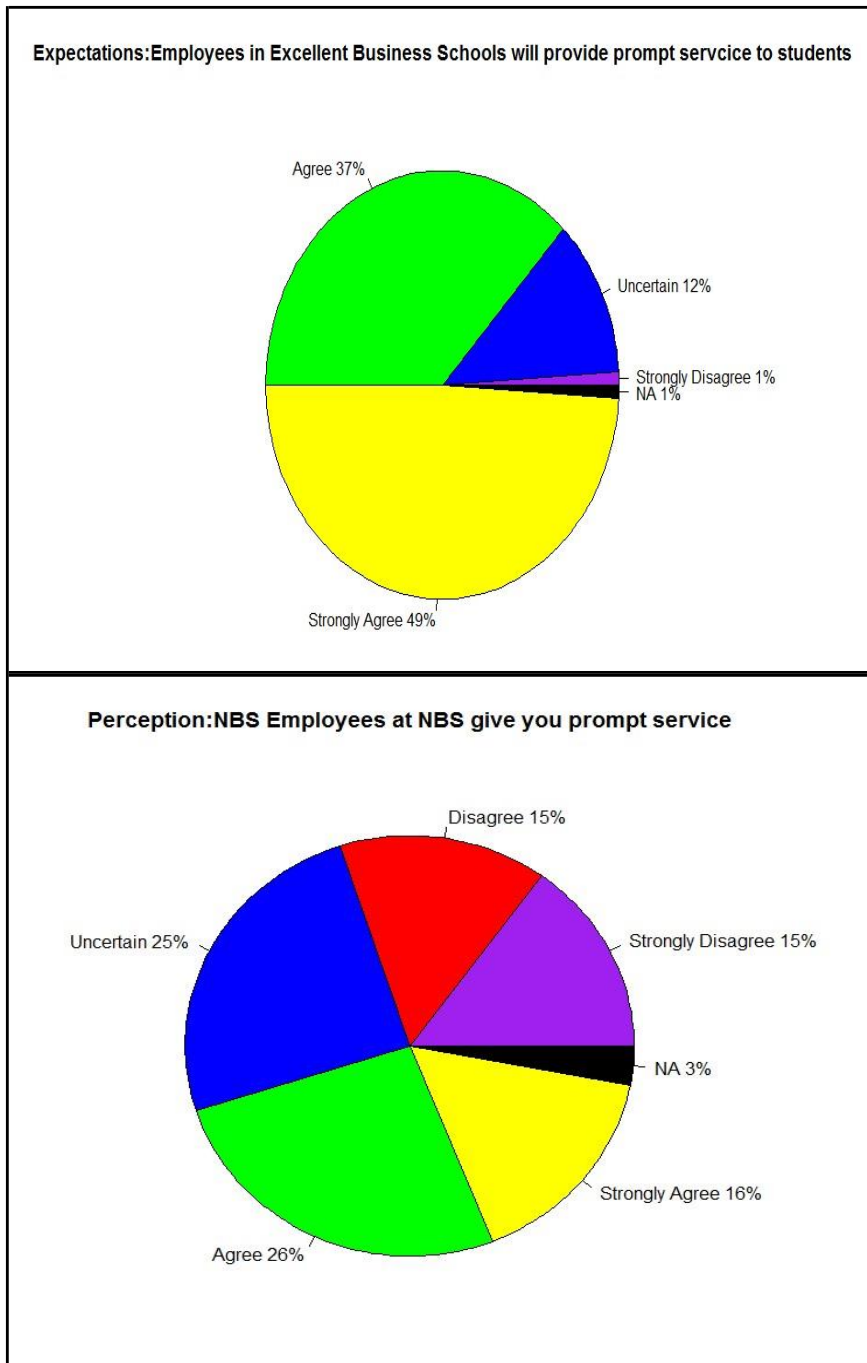


Figure 17: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived responses on the provision of prompt services

86% agreed that they would expect excellent business school to provide timely services to students. When compared to the perception at NBS, it was found that only 42% agreed that services provision at NBS was prompt. At the same time, 25% were uncertain, and 30% disagreed.

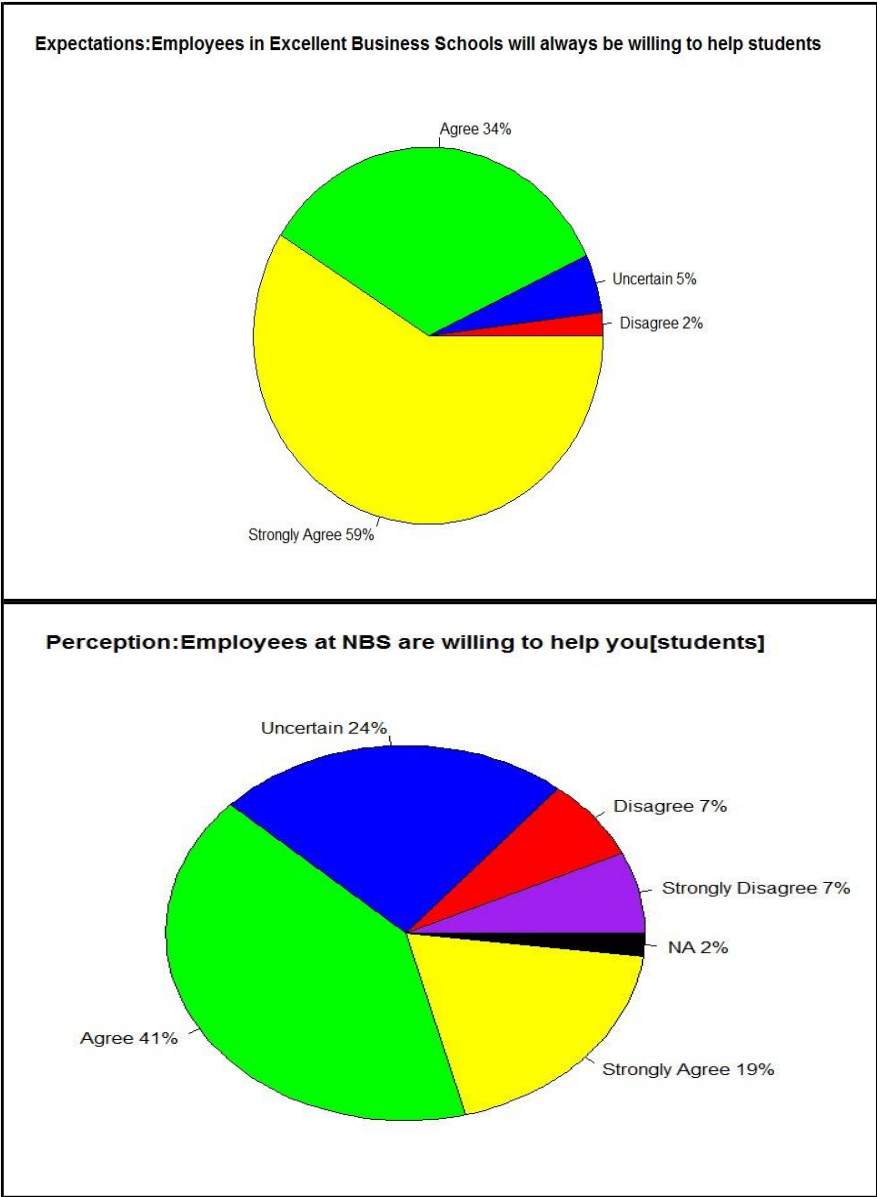


Figure 18: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived willingness of employees to help students

The question was also asked on whether employees are always willing to help students. The expectations of the respondent were as follows: 93% agreed that employees of excellent business schools should be prepared to help students. The perception at NBS was that only about 60% agreed that NBS employees are willing to help students.

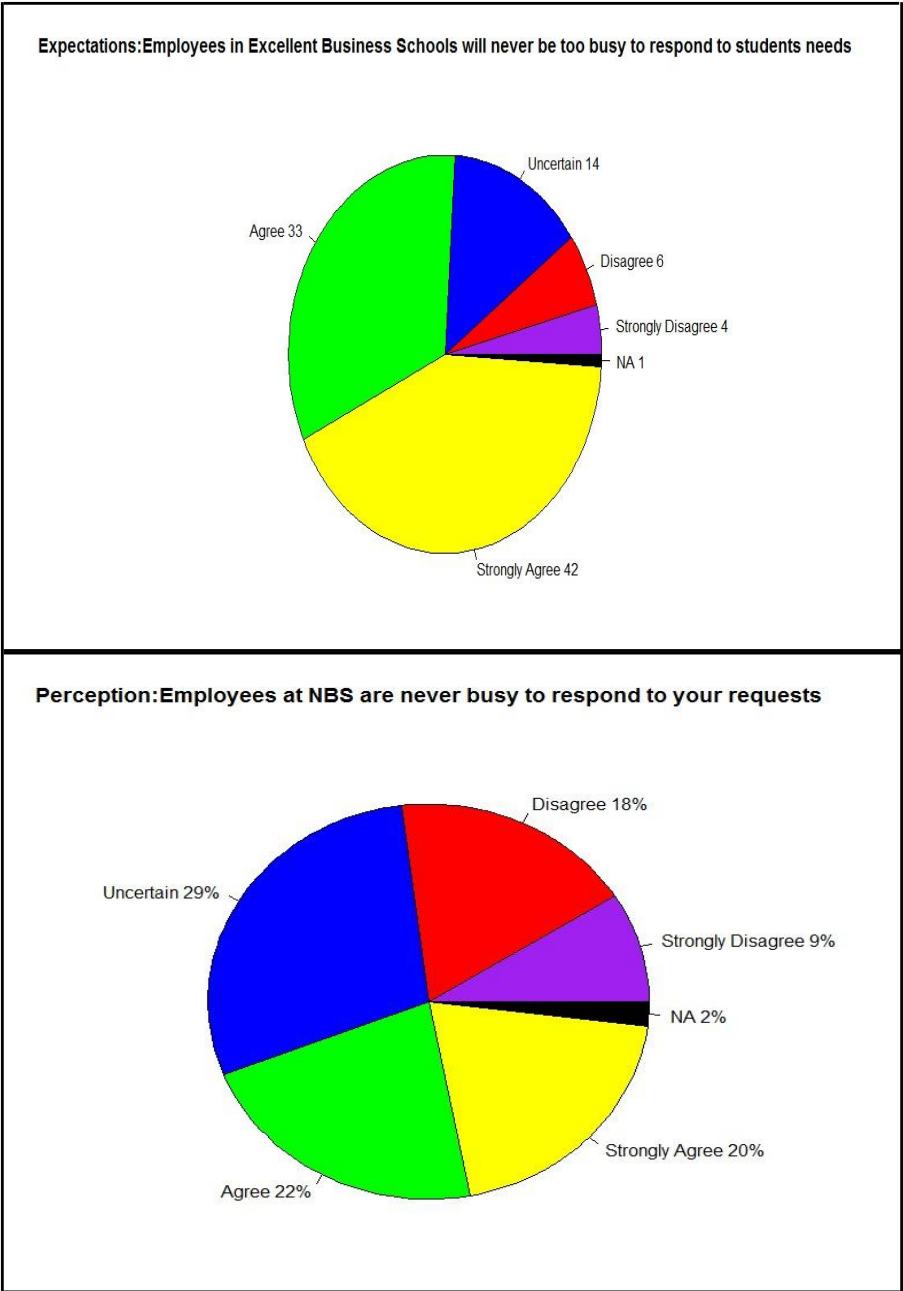


Figure 19: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived results of whether employees have time to respond to your requests

Another theme that was examined was if, “Excellent Business schools will never be too busy to respond to the needs of students,” 75% agreed that they expect business schools not to be too busy to respond to student needs. The perceived agreement for the readiness of employees to respond to student request stood at 42%, with an uncertainty of 29% and 27% disagreeing.

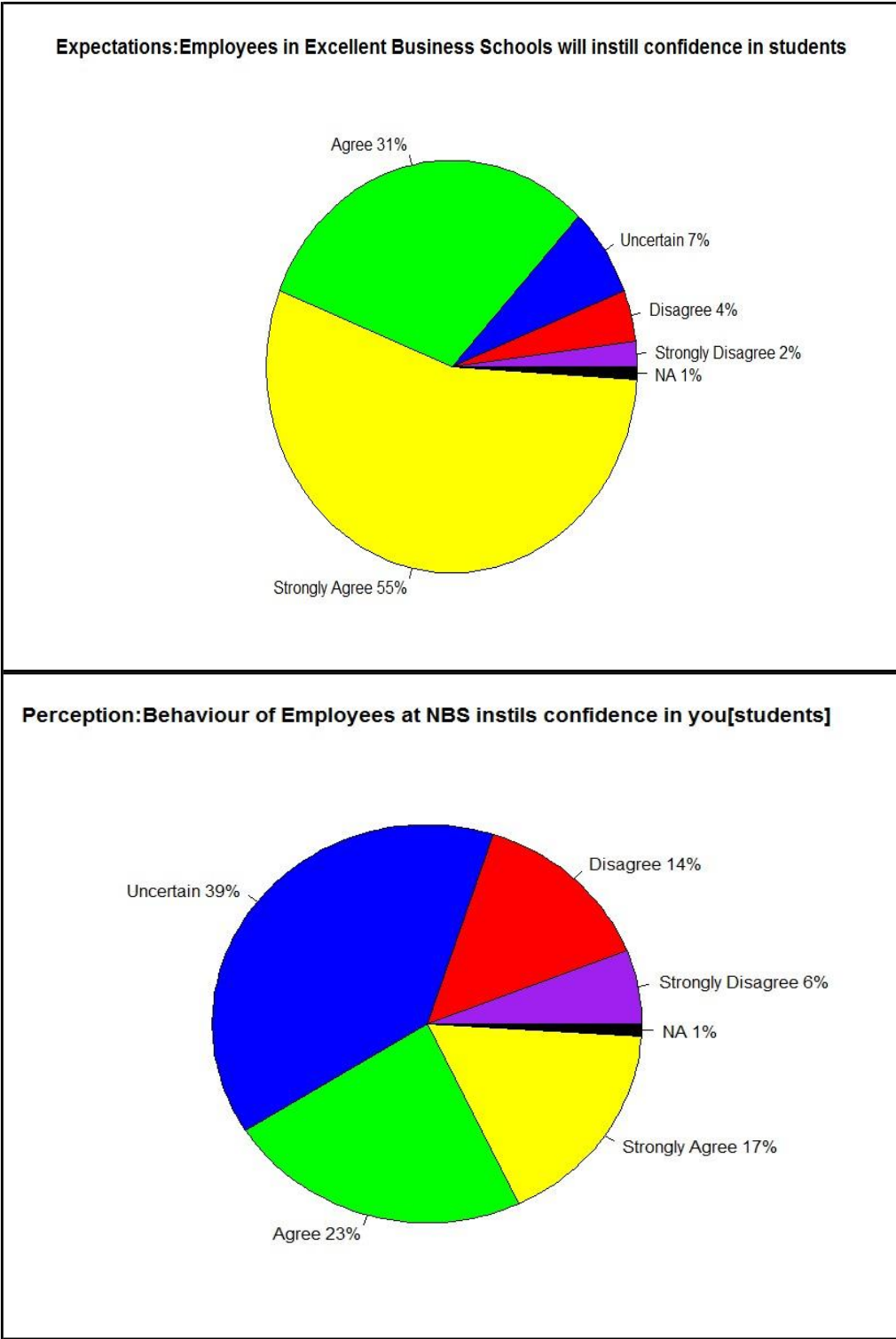


Figure 20: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived results of whether business schools instil confidence in students

Responses were also sought on whether excellent business schools are expected to instill confidence in students, the findings were strongly agreed (55%), agree (31%). A combined 40% (strongly agree and agree) that in deed NBS was instilling confidence in their students.

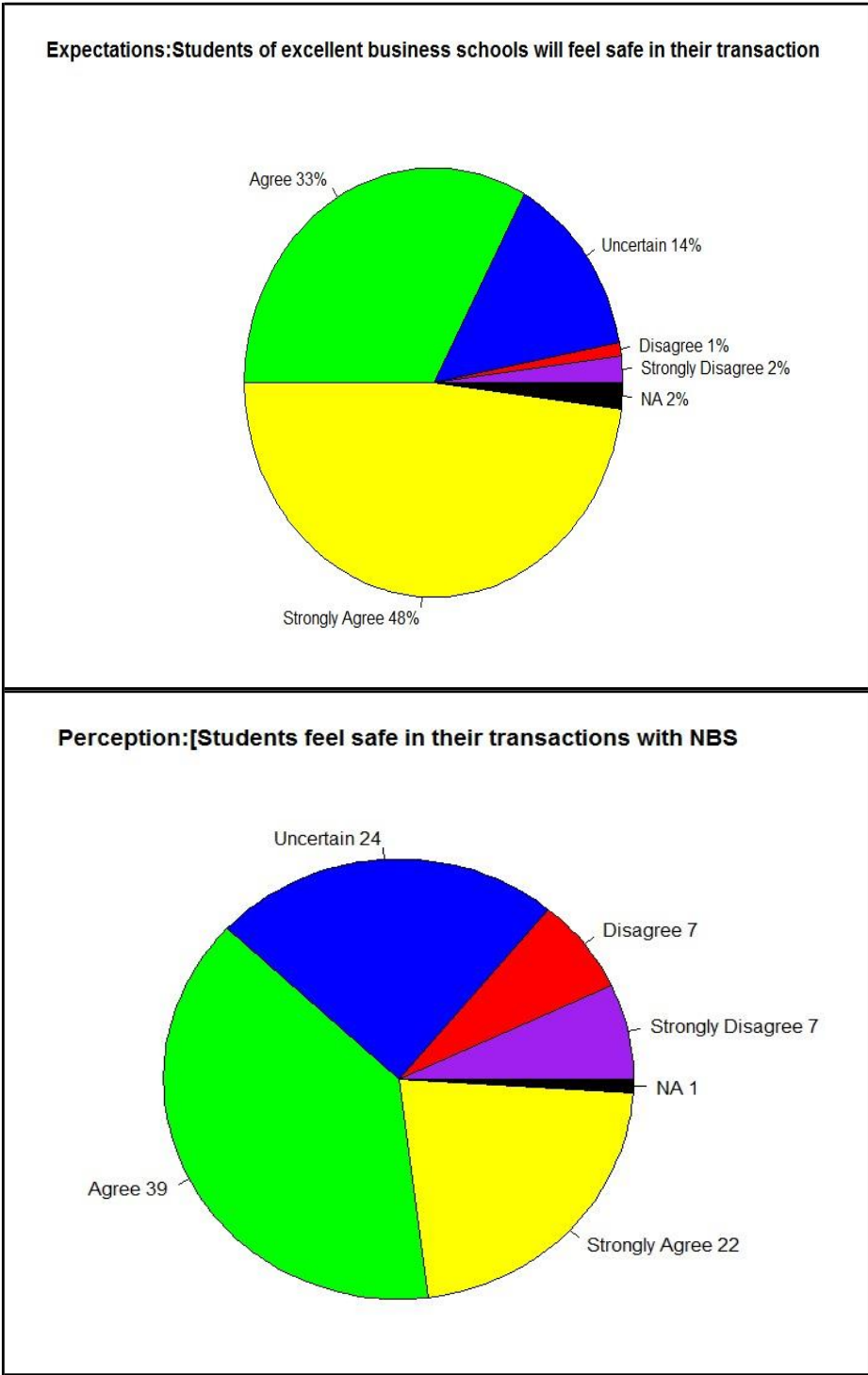


Figure 21: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived results of whether students feel safe in their transactions with NBS

A question on whether students of excellent business schools are expected to feel safe in their transactions found that only 81% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed. The perception was however only 61% of the respondents felt safe in their transactions with NBS.

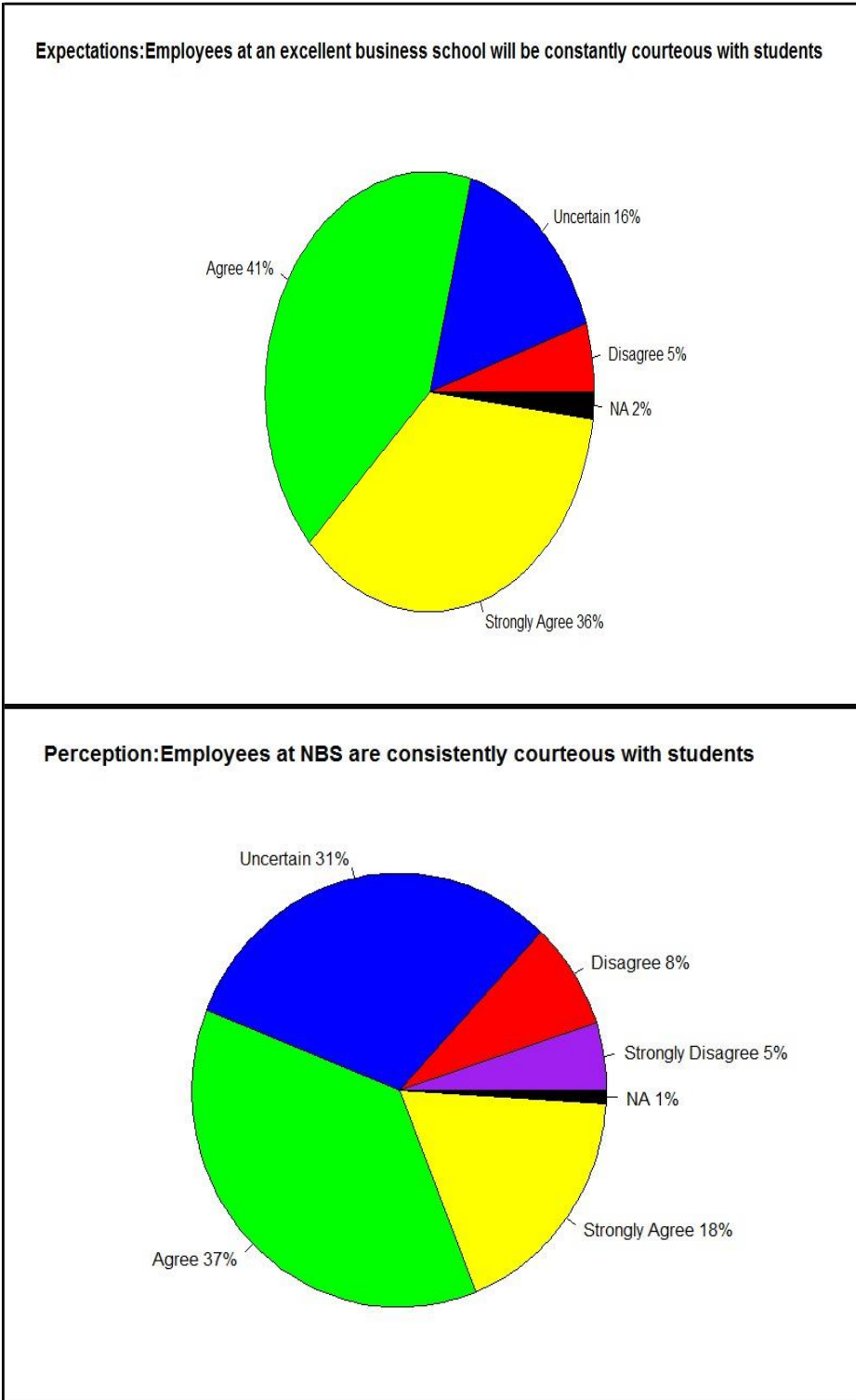


Figure 22: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived results on whether employees are consistently courteous with students

The analysis of whether the school is constantly courteous with students revealed that 78% expected the school to be courteous. On the perception end, however, only 37% strongly agreed, and 16% agreed that employees are courteous with students.

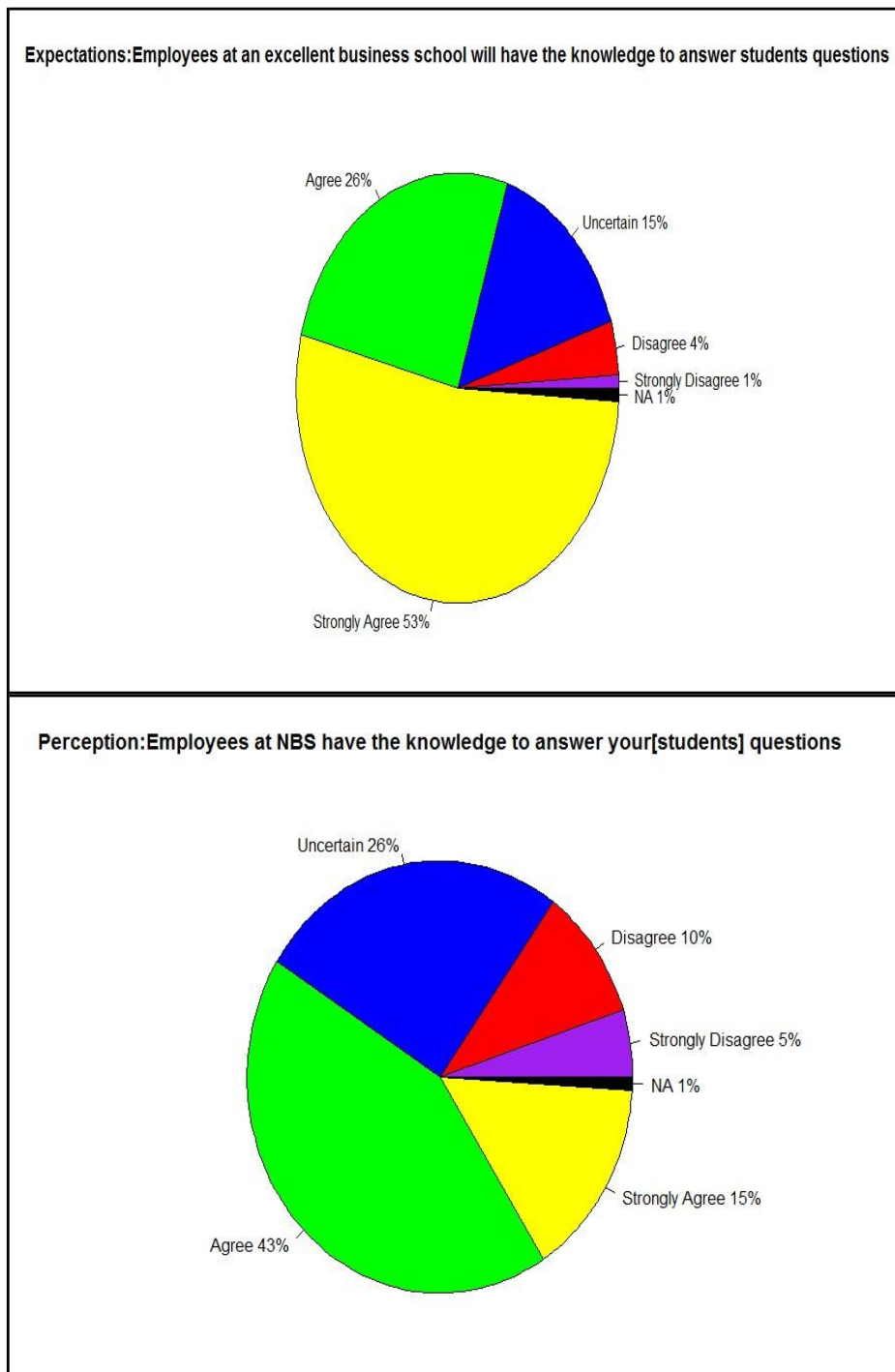


Figure 23: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived results on the knowledge of employees to answer student questions.

When the respondents were asked for their views regarding the knowledge of employees to answer students' questions, 79% of the respondents expect employees to have the knowledge to answer students' questions. Only 58% of the respondents were of the perception that employees have the knowledge to answer student questions.

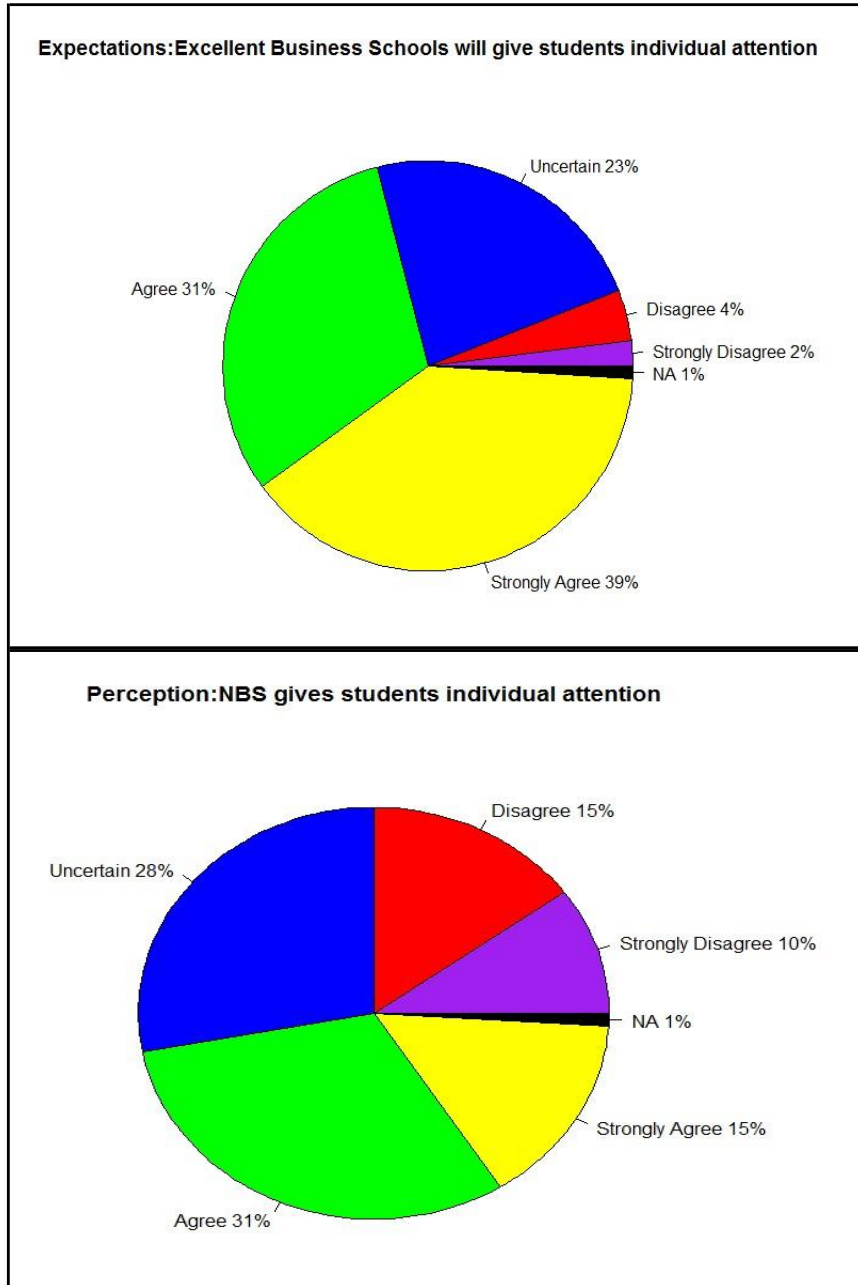


Figure 24: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived outcome on the readiness of the school to render individual attention to its students

When the question on whether the business school will give students individual attention, 70% of the respondents expect business schools to give students individual attention. Only 45% agreed that the business school was indeed giving students individual attention.

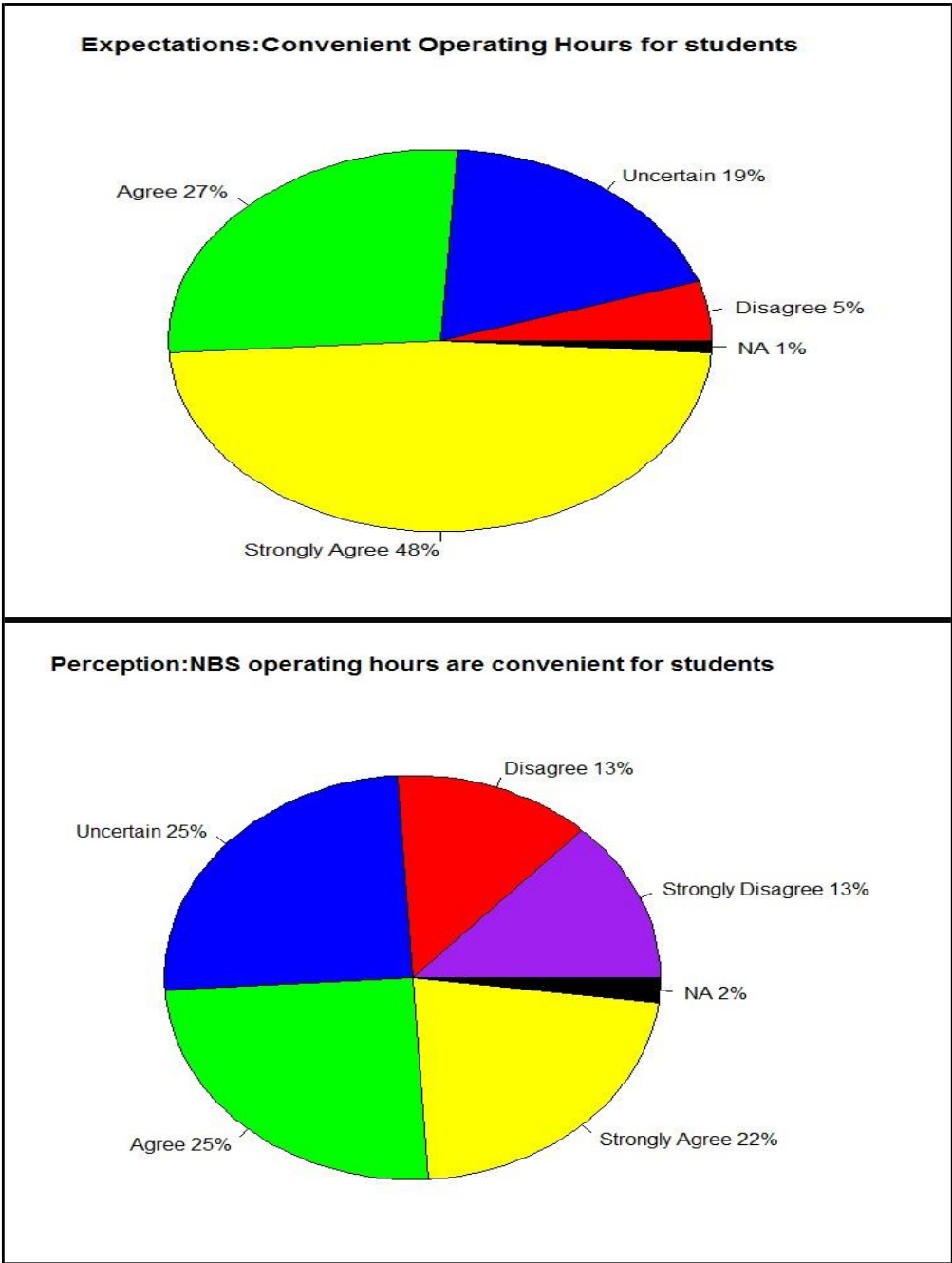


Figure 25: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived view on whether the business school operating hours are convenient for the students

An interrogation into the convenience of the operating hours of the business school for students revealed that although 75% expected the operating hours to be convenient, it was only perceived as such by 47% of the respondents.

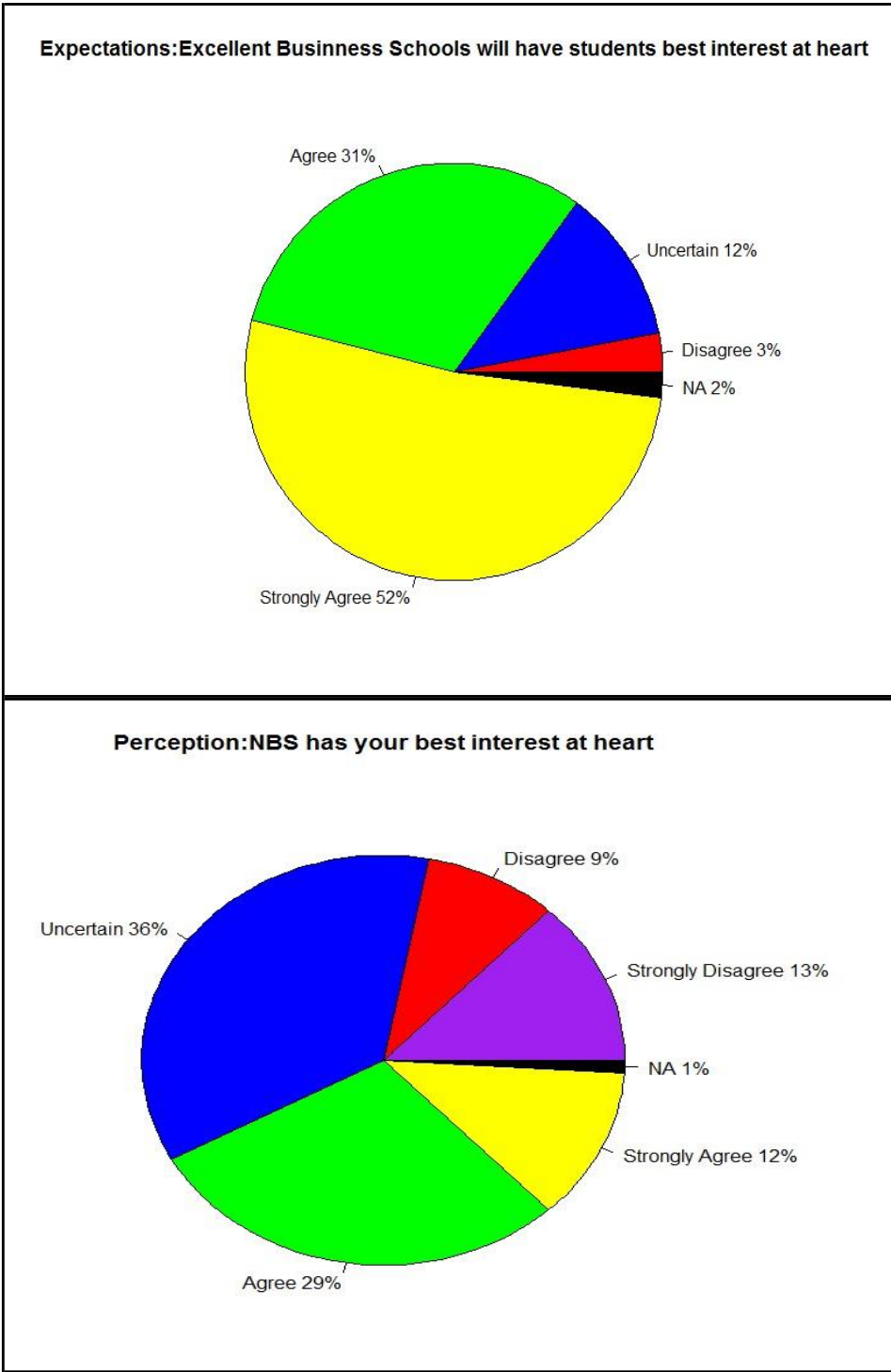


Figure 26: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived on the results of whether business schools have students' best interests at heart

Respondents were also asked for their expectation and perception concerning whether business schools have the students best interest at heart, 83% were of the expectation that schools should have the students interest at heart. On the contrary, only 41% agreed that NBS had their interest at heart.

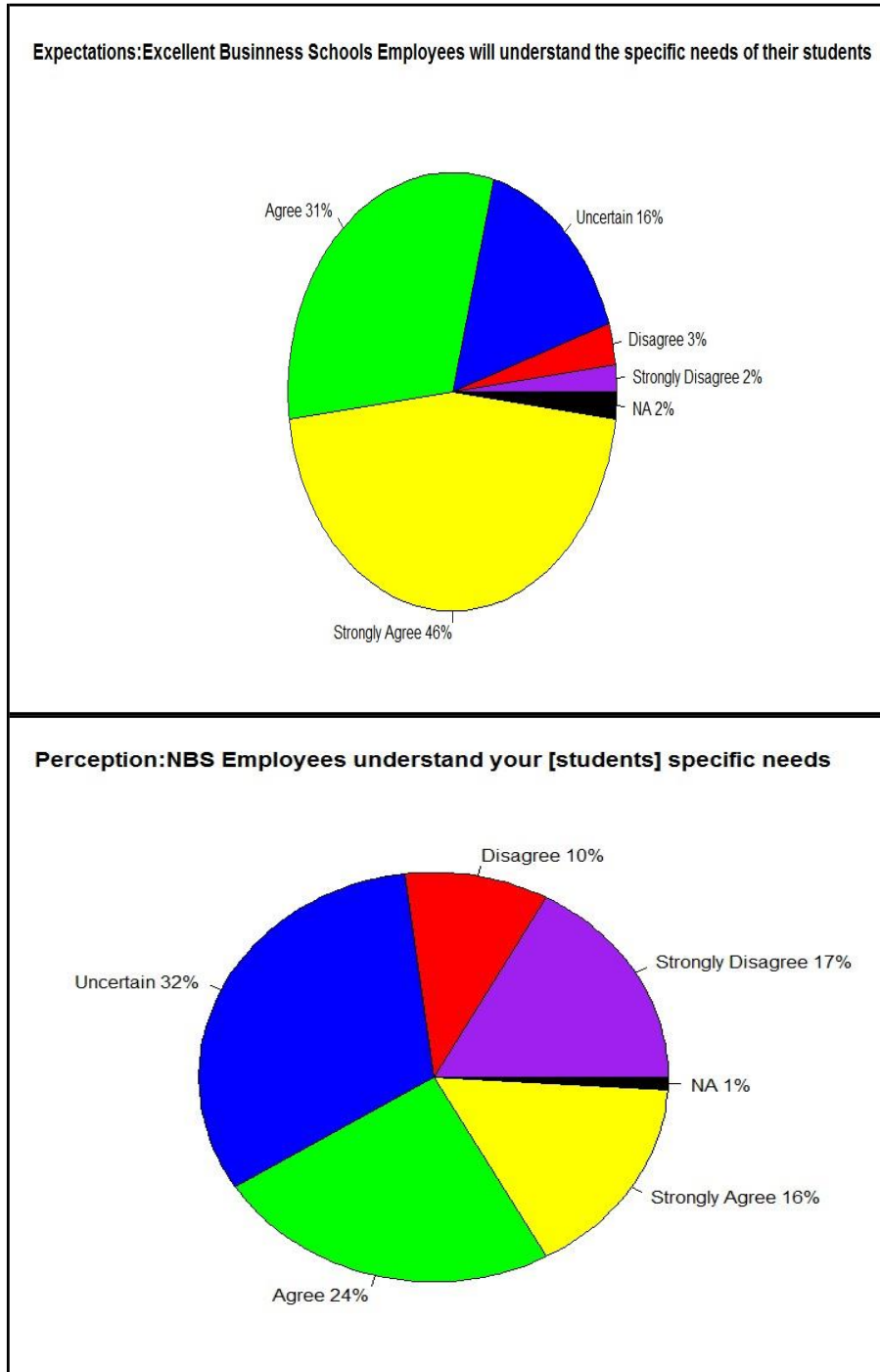


Figure 27: Pie charts comparing the Expected and perceived outcome of whether employees understand the specific needs of the students

The pie charts above depict that on the probing of whether business school employees will understand the specific needs of their students, 77% agreed that they expect employees to understand the specific needs of their students while only 40% were of the perception that employees understand students specific need.

Summary

This chapter presented findings of the study Data interpretation and data analysis was provided in this chapter. A general description of the consumers' expectations and perceptions of the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model was done using descriptive statistics. Also, a gap score analysis was carried based on the difference between the expectations and perceptions ($P - E$) to assess service quality and customer (student) satisfaction.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss findings simultaneously. Ensuring interpretation of the results, it is prudent and logical to adopt such an approach, as a discussion of results that follow the analysis is essential in understanding the findings at each stage. This process creates answers to each of the researcher's objectives in chapter 2, the objectives that guided the study on students' perception on service quality are as follows:

- To identify students' expectancies on the service quality provided by the NBS.
- To investigate the service quality perception of the students on the level of service quality provided by the NBS.
- To measure the gap between students' expectations, perceptions, and the actual service delivery by the NBS.

The discussion is divided into three sections, namely:

Objective 1: To identify students' expectancies on the service provided by the NBS.

Objective 2: To investigate the service quality perceptions of students about the level of service quality provided by NBS.

Objective 3: To measure the gaps between the expectations and perceptions, and the actual service delivery from the NBS.

These three sections tackle the research objectives, while the final summary focuses on the objectives discussed in these sections; bringing into play the characteristics to support each

respondent's proposed suggestion through the answers provided to the university management on perceived service delivery.

5.1. Objective 1: To identify students' expectancies on the service provided by the NBS.

The discussion focuses its foundations on the research objectives to determine the students' perceptions, which happened to be the most important and best performing service quality characteristics. This set the basis for understanding the current service provision at the NBS. Expectations are formed before purchasing the service (Muddie and Cottam, 1999 as cited in Arpin, 2007). Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993), further claimed that customer expectations are beliefs about a service that serve as a standard against which service performance is judged.

Expectations of tangibles

Most students (90%) strongly agreed that the NBS has modern-looking equipment. Students' expectations are very high regarding the appearance of physical facilities at the NBS. Most respondents (82%) expect employees at universities to appear neatly dressed. A total of 90% of the students agreed that materials such as brochures and handouts, which provide information to students, must be visually appealing. Students look at tangibles as quality indicators of the service quality. The respondents stressed that university management should consider characteristics perceived to be important rather than in an ad-hoc manner. The ability of the university management to understand prioritized characteristics of the student perception of service provision would inform their decision on equal distribution of scarce resources effectively and efficiently.

Expectations of reliability

The highest expectation score for reliability is related to the NBS providing their services at the time they promised to do so.

This score means that respondents expect university staff to show sincerity in solving their problems. Reliability is defined by Parasuraman et al., (1988), reliability is the service provider's ability to perform certain services accurately and dependably. This can surely be helpful in terms of retaining customers. There is a core expectation from every student in terms of timely service delivery, in a professional and satisfying manner that would improve students' experiences.

Expectation of responsiveness

Parasuraman et al., (1988), refers to responsiveness as the willingness displayed when helping a customer. To meet expectations of customers, staff should make provision for timely service delivery. The Namibia Business School staff are expected to assist students. Regarding the performance of service, most respondents, (93%), expect employees at a university to tell students exactly when a service will be performed, and the same percentage of respondents expect the staff of the NBS to be willing to help students.

Expectations of assurance

The assurance dimension of service quality is highly dependent on employees' ability to communicate their credibility and to inspire trust and confidence, (Zeithaml et al., 2003). Most respondents, (86%), expect the behavior of the NBS employees to instil confidence in them, while 81% of respondents expect to feel safe in their transactions with the NBS. The NBS

employees are expected to be constantly courteous with students and 77% of the respondents reinforced this point.

79% of the respondents expect university employees to have the knowledge to answer students' questions. It is imperative that to improve or provide par excellence, a trained, knowledgeable, and experienced staff compliment must be prioritized and recruited.

Expectations of empathy

The highest expectation score for empathy was rated for students expecting the NBS to have the students' best interests at heart. A total of 75% of the respondents felt that a university should have operating hours convenient to all students; universities should have students' best interests at heart and understand students' specific needs.

5.2 Objective 2: To investigate the service quality perceptions of students about the level of service quality provided by the NBS

Perceptions are considered relative to expectations. Customers perceive service in terms of the quality of the service they receive and whether or not they are satisfied with their experiences (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Sahney, Banwet and Karunes (2004), do compare the perceptions of "the customers" relating to these requirements and characteristics with their expectations and thus, determine "service quality".

Perception of tangibles

More than the average of the respondents, (57%), agreed that staff at the NBS are neat-appearing, while 30% of the respondents were uncertain on the matter of the neat appearance of

NBS staff. Staff image portrays the image of the NBS. Materials associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) for the NBS was rated with the highest perception score of 3.61, (Table 4), on the tangible dimension. The perception on whether the NBS has the modern looking equipment is 45% and 37% of the respondents agreed that the NBS facilities are visually appealing.

Perception of reliability

The highest perception score for reliability 3.06, (Table.4), was that the NBS shows sincere interest in solving problems.

Only 33% of the respondents agreed that the NBS insists on error-free records. A minority of respondents, (25%), agreed with the statement that the NBS delivers on service promises timeously, while 42% of respondents disagreed with the statement, creating cause for concern on the reliability dimension for NBS.

A minority of respondents (21%) agreed that the NBS performs services correctly the first time, while 48% of the respondents disagreed that services at the NBS are performed correctly the first time and sometimes repeated effort was required in completing the service. According to Dorian, (1996 as cited in Arpin, 2007), accuracy means that staff must actively attempt to do things correctly the first time, as mistakes cost time and money.

Perception of responsiveness

Almost half (42%), of the respondents agreed that the NBS gives students prompt service, while 30% of respondents disagreed that they receive prompt service from the NBS. Changing students' perceptions in this area may involve staff training and a focus on efficiency.

Parasuraman et al., (1988), defined responsiveness as the willingness to assist customers and to provide prompt service. Promptness also captures the notion of flexibility and the ability to customize the service to customer needs.

Parasuraman et al., (1988), defines responsiveness as a firm's willingness to assist its customers by providing fast and efficient service performance. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that the NBS employees are willing to help students. This is also proven by the fact that this perception has received the highest gap score of 3.60, (Table 4), within that dimension.

When there is a positive gap score, it indicates that the perception of the students exceeds their expectation in that area, whilst a negative gap score means that expectations of customers exceed their perception in that area.

Perception of assurance

The highest perception score on assurance with a score of 3.63, (Table.4), is related to the behavior of the NBS employees having the ability to instil confidence in students. More than an average of the respondents, (58%), agreed that the NBS employees have the knowledge to answer their questions, while 15% disagreed; this is supported by the definition of assurance by Parasuraman et al., (1988), as the ability of the company and its employees to inspire trust and confidence in what they do. Fifty five percent (50%) of the respondents agreed that the NBS employees show courteousness to students, while 13% disagreed; this proves that employees can successfully make the students feel important and comfortable in their surroundings.

Perception of empathy

Empathy implies that employees will pay attention, listen, adapt and be flexible in delivering what individual customers need, (Zeithaml et al., 2003). The highest perception score of 3.31 on the empathy dimension was that the NBS gives students individual attention, with 46% of the respondents agreeing with the statement, while 25% disagreed.

Forty one percent (41%), of the respondents agreed that the NBS has the students' best interests at heart, while 40% agreed that the bulk of the employees understand students' specific needs.

.5.3 Objective 3: To measure the gaps between the expectations and perceptions, and the actual service delivery from the NBS.

With the usage of the SERVQUAL model, each dimension of the service quality a gap score is calculated. According to Hessamaldin, (2008), Gap analysis defines service quality in terms of the gap between what the service should provide and the customer's perception of what the service actually provides. Quality is assessed when expectations are subtracted from perceptions. The Gap analysis score enables the researcher to find out how students perceive service quality at the NBS and to identify which service quality dimensions they are satisfied with and a negative score indicates that the service which was provided to the student was worse than what was expected. The table below indicates the Gap Score Analysis for this study:

Dimensions	Mean Service Quality at NBS (Perception)	Mean Service Quality at NBS (Expectations)	Gap Score (P-E)	Ranking
Tangibles	3.275252526	4.334735622	-1.059483096	2

Reliability	2.795031952	4.323363324	-1.528331371	1
Responsiveness	3.291161988	4.335454545	-1.044292557	3
Assurance	3.494949495	4.165069058	-0.670119563	5
Empathy	3.221165739	4.139816533	-0.918650794	4
Total Gap	3.190130102	4.251850755	-1.044175476	

Table 6: Gap analysis for NBS

The average level of service quality at the NBS in relation to the different dimensions, registered gap scores of *Tangibles* (-1.059), *Reliability* (-1.528), *Assurance* (-0.670), *Responsiveness* (-1.443) and *Empathy* (-0.919). Considering the average scores of the five dimensions of service quality, it appears that the score for Assurance is lower than Empathy, followed by Responsiveness, Tangibles and Reliability, which had higher scores.

According to Donlagić and Fazlic, (2015), when using the SERVQUAL methodology for each dimension of the service quality, a gap score is calculated and a negative score shows that the service which was provided to the student was worse than was expected. The presence of negative quality gaps in all the five dimensions was determined.

The results indicate that the widest gap exists within the dimension of *Reliability* which is related to perception of service quality rendered by the NBS. This is an indication that the administrative staff and lecturers are not able to respond and answer the students' queries with a high degree of reliability and consistency as well as the inability to perform certain services accurately and dependably. Zafiroopoulos and Vrana, (2008), also found similar results regarding the *Reliability* presenting the biggest scores among the dimensions. In their study entitled: *Measuring Business Schools' Service Quality in an Emerging Market Using an Extended SERVQUAL Instrument*, authors E. Mbise & Tuninga, (2012), found that Reliability and Responsiveness in the

execution of duties carried out by institutions' employees was more common among business (public) schools in Tanzania. Tan, Wong, Lam, Ooi, and Ng, (2010), similarly had a high gap in the dimension of *Reliability* and their study showed that there is a significant influence on knowledge sharing in the students' perception of service quality rendered by the studied institution. The authors emphasized that it is a prerequisite for administrative staff and lecturers to be able to respond and answer the students' query reliably by giving their answers accurately and consistently.

The *Tangibles* dimension observed the second widest gap, which is almost like the findings of Green, (2014), who found *Tangibles* to have the largest gap at a South African higher education institution. This could be suggestive that students perceive that the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials for the NBS are not in good state or that they do not accommodate the needs of the students.

After *Tangibles*, *Responsiveness* was found to be the third biggest gap, this dimension is generally related to employee sensitivity towards students, providing prompt services and responding to students' needs. According to Kabir and Carlsson (2010), who had a similar result, this dimension is also concerned with the willingness of employees to help the students and that the employees are never too busy to respond to requests from customers. This dimension can be connected to technical quality because the features are about how the service is delivered. The negative gap for this dimension indicates that students do not think that their overall expectations are satisfied within this dimension.

The gap score for *Empathy* is relatively low. Grönroos, (1983, as cited in Kabir and Carlsson 2010), described *Empathy* factors such as easy access, good communication and understanding

the customer , separately. The author suggested that easy access is connected to the approachability which means, for example if the operating hours are convenient, the location of the facilities are appropriate, the waiting times are short and there is easy access by telephone. Good communication is about keeping the student informed in a language they can understand and to listen to the student. With the low gap score of -0.919, this indicates that students perceive the level of empathy to be poor, and students perceive that they are not getting “personal attention”. According to Soni (2015) *Empathy* involves being skilled in sharing in the feelings and thoughts of other individuals in a particular situation; acting as though one is the other individual. Some of the issues portraying empathy are listening to others, displaying interest and attention, making efforts to understand others, and information sharing. Soni (2015) further states that in a higher education context, an empathetic lecturer must understand the mind-set of students, be close to them (accessible), show interest in student concerns, and put himself/herself in the student’s personal situation.

Assurance is found to be the last highest dimension in this study. The negative gap score indicates that students’ perceptions regarding this dimension is lower than what they expected and there is no satisfaction. *Assurance* means that the student wants to rely on courteous and knowledgeable employees who convey trust and confidence.(Kabir & Carlsson, 2010). In their study titled *Assessing the Relationship Between Higher Education Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction* authors Al-Alak & Alnaser (2012) results indicated a significant at the 5% confidence level for the dimension *Assurance*, that means these variables are positively significant with student satisfaction. In other words, when student satisfaction increases, then the level of assurance increases as well.

Summarily, considering all the results for the dimensions, this study has a *Total Gap Score* of -1.044 meaning the level of service that the students receive from the NBS is lower than what they expect. The results show a negative score, as the students' expectations exceeded their perceptions. As service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction, which has been proven by Negi, (2009, as cited in (Daniel & Berinyuy, 2010)), it means that since students perceive service quality as low or poor, and therefore suggests that students are not satisfied with services offered at the NBS. This therefore means that the NBS needs to make improvements in all dimensions to close gaps that could lead to increased customer satisfaction.

SUMMARY

The researcher has critically analysed the findings from each respondent that participated, as well as literature presented in Chapter 2. Participants' data analysis and presentation in chapter 3 and 4 identified the all the dimensions as perceived by students at the NBS as well as their expectations from the NBS with respect to the dimensions. This chapter discussed the results that enabled the researcher to achieve the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATION

This chapter is divided into the following sections: Section 6.1 will detail the conclusions related to the results and analysis; Section 6.2 will present the recommendations and Section 6.3 will show the limitations of the findings and highlight areas for further research.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

The study investigated students' perceptions of service quality at the NBS. The study was centred on the basis that students are the main recipients of services from the NBS. This conclusion is based on the four objectives of this research paper which are as follows:

- To identify students expectancies on the service quality provided by the NBS.
- To investigate the service quality perception of the students about the level of service quality provided by the NBS.
- To measure the gap between students expectations, perceptions, and the actual service delivery from the NBS.
- To make suggestions based on the outcome of the results.

In general, there are still challenges faced in term of perception, reality, expectations, and satisfaction of the quality services offered by the Namibia Business School. Respondents' concerns varied regarding the individual conception of the quality of services experienced and the interaction of the staff responsible for ensuring that the best quality and customer services are professional, efficient and satisfactory always.

This research focused on investigating and evaluating the quality services delivery experienced by students enrolled at the Namibia Business School and the Impact of staff that enhances quality, meeting expectations and satisfaction.

Literature has proven that the quality of services in any given organization is measurable, whether it is on par or exceeds client expectation and satisfaction. It is compulsory for every service-oriented business to provide customers the required services it has promised uncompromisingly whether the customers' expectations are satisfied or compared to existing competitors. Customers are the best mirror for refining the best quality services while advancing maximum satisfaction for their monies. This, in return brings an institution into a much more prominent position based on the best experiences of its most prized assets, the students. The tool used to measure the service quality, namely, the SERVQUAL model is widely used and focuses around the five (5) dimensions of service. These are quality, reliability, accountability, empathy and tangible factors. In the absence of incorporating these five (5) dimensions in service delivery, dissatisfaction would arise, thus leading to reputational damages, poor ratings, and negative publicity.

From the results, it is evident that the quality of service at the NBS is not satisfactory and improvement is needed. The gap score analysis carried out revealed that the overall service quality is low as perceived by the NBS students and hence meaning, there is no customer satisfaction. The overall perceived service quality is low as expectations exceed perceptions, meaning students desired more than what was offered to them. The findings prove that there is no dimension of service quality that brings student satisfaction at the NBS.

Evidence from the study shows that, the NBS has to improve performance on all the dimensions of service quality, to increase student satisfaction since students expect more than what is being offered by the school. This will enable them to maintain a high level of competitiveness. From an analyses of the questionnaires; it can be concluded that people's perceptions in terms of weighting importance and performances vary in prioritizing quality of services. According to Wright, (1996, as cited in Ong, 2013), increasing students' perceptions of their educational experiences have become important as colleges and universities attempt to become more customer-oriented to gain or maintain an advantage in an ever more competitive academic environment.

For a student to appreciate and pursue their studies to completion, the NBS' management needs to ensure that its staff, both academic and support, understand their role and how critical and crucial it is to the school's reputation. Raphael, (2014), concluded that since all tertiary colleges aim at growing; an uncontrolled growth, directly and negatively affects the quality of services provided and therefore balancing growth and quality is necessary. If growth continues but is not accompanied by an increase in service providers, such as front office staff, lecturers and administrators; facilities/equipment such as classes, computer laboratories, computers and library books; poor quality services and problems may not be eliminated. This may be the main cause of poor service quality and the cause of not being able to meet students' expectations, Raphael (2014).

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the respondents' expectations and perception of quality service at the NBS, the evidence is glaring that a significant amount of work needs to take place to improve and meet the

desired outcome, in view of the objectives, findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- It is the responsibility of the management team to review and adjust accordingly, the various levels of service quality based on its priority and performance of results. The strategy employed based on an informed decision would promote best resources allocations that will produce a greater marginal benefit in term of service quality improvement and streamlining assets to avoid erroneous initiatives. Zeithaml et al., (2009), recommended that a *service quality programme* must be undertaken that monitors service quality periodically, involves employees and utilises a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Beaumont, (2012), suggested that, Firstly, the programme must be varied and utilize a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research techniques since each individual research method has its own limitations. Secondly, the measurement of service quality must be ongoing since expectations and perceptions of customers are dynamic and constantly changing. Accordingly, the school should utilise a continuous approach, concentrating on periodical evaluations of service quality throughout the year rather than at the end of each semester, Beaumont, (2012). Thirdly, the service quality improvement programme should be initiated with employees, (e.g. academic staff and administration staff) as the closeness of staff to customers within the services sector makes it important that they are asked about problems and possible improvements as well as their personal motivations and requirements. Beaumont, (2012), further suggested that management should include in their service improvement programme: *Quality of Seminars; Availability of Academic Staff; Prompt and Efficient Feedback on Work; Access to Academic Facilities and Learning Resources and an Internal Student Feedback Systems Table.*

- Students must have the opportunity to evaluate and assess the quality of services at all levels and provide feedback in making informed decisions for aligning programs, performances, and deliveries that address the crucial needs of these students. To improve the quality of services, one must employ a radical approach rather than maintaining the status quo.
- To effect quality assurance, regulate and maintain an improved standard of services, the NBS will have to move beyond just compliance with or assessment of quality processes. The school will have to ensure that outcomes are measured; even the ones that seem to be abstract, problematic and seemingly difficult to reach an agreement. The school represents one of the finest and convenient mediums, through which passionate individuals can pursue higher education, regardless of the busy schedules; therefore, an uncompromised commitment to quality at all levels of service delivery needs to be at the best level for all enrolled students, at all times.
- It is recommended that measures be put in place to close the negative gaps where the perceived scores for each service quality dimension falls short of the expected rating for that service quality dimension. The largest gap pertains to the *Reliability* dimension of service quality, the variable ‘providing the service as promised’, can be achieved by stressing to academic staff, the need to start and end their lectures according to schedule. In addition, it is essential that lecturers have consultation times and are available for student consultation during those times, (Soni, 2015). Important events such as examinations, tests, tutorials, and assignments, must be clearly communicated through schedules, which are strictly adhered to. In the case of the NBS, the school does not have

permanent lecturers and this might prove to be a challenge, the school will have to recruit an individual who will be tasked with co-ordinating the above-mentioned in order to guarantee that the tasks are done timeously.

- The NBS staff must be trained in their respective fields, thereby, equipping them to be able to provide the service in the correct manner. Displaying sympathy to solving student problems is an item that can be addressed by making it clear to students that the institution and its staff are sympathetic to their problems and would, if they can, try their best to address and resolve student problems, (Soni, 2015). The institution and its staff should visibly be seen to make genuine efforts to resolve student problems as effectively and efficiently as is required. It is suggested that the school engages in dialogue with their students in order to understand their needs.

The findings of this study imply that the process of improving and maintaining the highest service quality lies within the vision and mission, of the Namibia Business School. The purpose of its formation, competence, experience and diversity of the management team and work force to deliver the intended programme, services and training of all its enrolled students. In this paradigm, the pressure is constant on higher education institutions to deliver, in various ways. The focus is centered on meeting expectation with accountability. Previously, there was a silent acceptance that universities were the best place to judge the quality of higher education. This perception is accompanied by the understanding that higher education should not be regulated nor quality assessed by anyone but academicians; while the idea of peer review was reified.

It is now a different reality if higher education institutions are to maintain quality and improve on the level of progress achieved, there must be a broader demand for uncompromised accountability and a willingness to engage in debates, surveys, research, and reviews. The research has covered a wide range, setting the basis for further researchers to build the foundation laid, by focusing on the continuous quality improvement of the higher education landscape.

6.4 LIMITATION

Regarding this study, the researcher was subject to various limitations that may have hindered its accuracy. Consequently, interpretation of findings should be considered with caution since constraints accentuate the chance of methodological issues. The study was confined to the postgraduate students at the Namibia Business School, at the University of Namibia, hence findings may not be generalizable.

The research only considered a small sample of 100 students. Accordingly, since the study concentrated its focus around a limited sample group, it would be inappropriate to generalise the findings of the study to all Namibian universities. At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the significance of the findings. Instead, the 100 respondents' findings present a strong case for service quality, providing invaluable insights that are specific to the Namibia Business School, which service, management could consider when addressing service quality issues.

As a result, this study acts as a foundational basis that the NBS management can use as a starting point in their quest to understand the complexities associated with service quality from the viewpoint of students. Although the researcher maintained best efforts to ensure that equality

existed between participants, the use of a convenience sample could have introduced an element of bias to the investigation. Future studies can focus on replicating the identified model across different streams of higher education to establish the validity. It may also be worthwhile to bring in the perceptions of other stakeholders like administrators, educators and parents in future studies.

The researcher recommends that similar studies be conducted with other Namibian educational institutions. For further research, the researcher suggests that the researchers could do interviews to find out more details. During interviews, it is possible to explain the questions and ask follow-up questions. Finally, in future, researchers could consider conducting comparative studies between public and private sector educational institutions within Namibia to further improve understanding into service quality dimensions and its impact on student satisfaction.

SUMMARY

This final chapter summarised and concluded the study and presented some recommendations. It revisited the limitations to the study, especially those relating to research methodology and generalisation. A brief discussion of future research directions concluded the thesis.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT LETTER

Acknowledgement of Consent

I Jennifer Haihambo, am currently undertaking a research project as part of my studies towards a Masters in Business Administration: Entrepreneurship with the Namibia Business School at the Business schools of Namibia

The aim of the research is to investigate students' perception of service quality at the Namibia Business School.

The answers you will provide in the questionnaire will be for research purposes only. Participation is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

As a willing participant in this research, can you please sign and date your consent.

I N/A voluntarily agree to take part by completing the attached questionnaire and fully understand that I may withdraw at any time.

Signature.....Date.....

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,
Jennifer Haihambo

APPENDIX 2 : QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire consists of two sections, Section A and Section B. Please complete all sections. Thank you.

Please provide the following information (Please cross x)

GENDER

Male	
Female	

COURSE OF STUDY

Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration	
MBA Finance	
MBA Strategic Management	
MBA Natural Resources	
MBA Entrepreneurship	
Doctor of Business Administration	

Directions for Service Expectations Questionnaire

Based on your experiences as a student of the Namibia Business School, please think about the kind of Business schools that would deliver excellent quality of service. Think about a Business schools with which you would be pleased to do business. Rating guide is as follows:

RATINGS	
1	STRONGLY DISAGREE
2	DISAGREE
3	UNCERTAIN
4	AGREE
5	STRONGLY AGREE

		EXPECTATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Excellent business school's will have modern-looking equipment.	1	2	3	4	5
2	The physical facilities at an excellent business school will be visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Employees at an excellent business school will be neat-appearing.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Materials associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually appealing at an excellent business school.	1	2	3	4	5
5	When excellent business school's promise to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	1	2	3	4	5
6	When a student has a problem, an excellent business school will show a sincere interest in solving it.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Excellent business school's will perform the service right the first time.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Excellent business school's will provide their services at the time they promise to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Excellent business school's will insist on error-free records.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Employees in excellent business school's will tell students exactly when services will be performed.	1	2	3	4	5

11	Employees in excellent business school's will give prompt service to students.	1	2	3	4	5
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		EXPECTATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
12	Employees in excellent business school's will always be willing to help students.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Employees in excellent business school's will never be to busy to respond to students' requests.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The behaviour of employees in excellent business school's will instill confidence in students.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Students of excellent business school's will feel safe in their transactions.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Employees at excellent business school's will be constantly courteous with students.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Employees at excellent business school's will have the knowledge to answer students' questions.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Excellent business school's will give students' individual attention.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Excellent business school's will have operating hours convenient to all their students.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Excellent business school's will have employees who give students personal attention.	1	2	3	4	5

21	Excellent business school's will have the students' best interest at heart.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The employees of excellent business school's will understand the specific needs of their students.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions for Service Perceptions Questionnaire

Show the extent to which you believe the Namibia Business School has a feature described by the statement. Once again, circling a 1 means you strongly disagree that the Namibia Business School has that feature, and circling a 5 means that you strongly agree. You may circle any of the numbers in the middle that show how strong your feelings are. There are no right and wrong answers - all we are interested in is a number that best shows your perceptions about the Namibia Business School.

RATINGS	
1	STRONGLY DISAGREE
2	DISAGREE
3	UNCERTAIN
4	AGREE
5	STRONGLY AGREE

		PERCEPTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	NBS has modern-looking equipment.	1	2	3	4	5
2	NBS's physical facilities are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
3	NBS's employees are neat-appearing.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Materials associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing at the NBS	1	2	3	4	5
5	When NBS promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.	1	2	3	4	5
6	When you have a problem, NBS shows sincere interest in solving it.	1	2	3	4	5

7 NBS performs the service right the first time. 1 2 3 4 5

8	NBS provides its services at the time it promises to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
9	NBS insists on error-free records.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Employees at NBS tell you exactly when services will be performed.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Employees at NBS give you prompt service.	1	2	3	4	5

		PERCEPTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
12	Employees at NBS are willing to help you.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Employees at NBS are never to busy to respond to your requests.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The behaviour of employees at NBS instills confidence in you.	1	2	3	4	5
15	You feel safe in your transactions with NBS	1	2	3	4	5
16	Employees at NBS are consistently courteous with you.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Employees at NBS have the knowledge to answer your questions.	1	2	3	4	5
18	NBS gives you individual attention.	1	2	3	4	5
19	NBS has operating hours convenient to all its students.	1	2	3	4	5
20	NBS has employees who give you personal attention.	1	2	3	4	5
21	NBS has your best interests at heart.	1	2	3	4	5

22	Employees at NBS understand your specific needs.	1	2	3	4	5
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APPENDIX 3 : QUESTIONNAIRE CODING

SERVQUAL Dimensions

Tangibles (TA)

TA1 NBS has up-to-date equipment.

TA2 Physical facilities are virtually appealing.

TA3 Employees are well dressed and appear neat.

TA4 Materials associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing at NBS

Reliability (RL)

RL1 When they promise to do something by a certain time, they do it.

RL2 When a student has a problem, they should show sincere interest in solving the problem.

RL3 Business schools perform the service right the first time.

RL4 They provide their services at the time they promise to do so.

RL5 Business school keeps their records accurately.

Responsiveness (RN)

RN1 Employees make information easily obtainable by students.

RN2 Employees give prompt services to students.

RN3 Employees are always willing to help students.

RN4 Employees are never too busy to respond to students' requests

Assurance (AS)

AS1 The behaviour of employees instil confidence in students

AS2 Students feel safe in their transactions with the employees

AS3 Employees are constantly courteous to students.

AS4 Employees of NBS have the knowledge to answer students' questions.

Empathy (EM)

EM1 NBS gives customers individual attention.

EM2 Operating hours of NBS are convenient for students.

EM3 Employees of NBS give students personal service.

EM4 NBS has its students' interest at heart.

EM5 Employees of NBS understand the specific needs of its students.