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Service User Perception of Service Quality in Addis Ababa City Administration, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Public sector organizations exist to provide services to citizens and citizens are service users, be it in public, private or other institutions. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the service quality gap in users' perception in select public sector organizations in Addis Ababa City. A cross-sectional survey method was applied and the sampling was carried out across three select government organizations. A questionnaire and interview method was used to gather the data. As a mixed method study, the analysis consisted of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research targeted 415 subjects for their service user perceptions, but 402 questionnaires were completed successfully, giving a 96.87% response rate. 63.9% were male and 36.1% were female respondents. Near to half percent of the respondents were married and most of the respondent was 9—12 completed. A statistically significant mean difference was observed between the overall level of assurance expectation ($t = 3.631$, $p < 0.01$) but insignificant mean difference was observed in service user perception ($t = 1.797$, $p > 0.05$). From the regression result responsiveness, assurance and empathy were statistically significant predictors of service user perception with the ($p < 0.05$), whereas tangible and reliability were found to be statistically insignificant in this study area.

Key Words: Service quality, Organization, User perception, Expectation, Addis Ababa City

1. Introduction

The public sector has responsibility and accountability for delivering efficient and effective services to communities and societies as customers. Though public service institutions, now days, have an ever-increasing demand to deliver best services and improve efficiency relative to previous times, demands are changing in their quality requirements in both government and private sectors. Quality service in the public arena is very important in any country. It cannot be considered as a privilege in a civilized and democratic society. Anticipating quality service is a legitimate expectation. Quality service satisfaction is a customer or client attitude that is created by evaluating the conditions before and after the service using common sense considerations

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(Oliver, 1980; Kotler, 1996). Customer perception as the level of one's feelings by comparing the service perceived to the performance or expected results.
This research was conducted to examine the relationship between service user perception and service quality. The findings indicate that there is no clear consensus on the nature of their relationship between perception and quality. Naik, Gantasala, and Prabhakar, **(**2010), indicated that service quality is an antecedent to customer perception; while Olorunniwo, Hsu, and Udo (2006) found that customer perception is caused by service quality. Others argue that neither customer perception nor service quality can be antecedent to the other (Dabbolkar, 1995; McAlexander, Kaldenberg, and Koenig, 1994). Genetu (2014) conducted interrelationships between service delivery and customer perception in insurance organizations. The analysis revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between service quality and service user perception observed. To achieve higher level of users' perception by improving service qualities in the sectors, the government of Ethiopia tried to restructure the civil service system as a structural adjustment with the federal sentiment (ECA, 2010). Civil service department was also empowered to implement different change reform programs and mobilization of manpower which is aimed at improving and providing quality service and satisfaction to users.

This paper is organized in six sections. The introductory section gives a brief description of the service user perception and service quality and a background of the public service sector in Addis Ababa. This is followed by relevant literature review relating to service quality. In the third section, the methodology of the research is described, followed by the results of the empirical analysis. In section five, the conclusions and important future directions are discussed. Finally, in section six, the recommendations for improving service quality in the public service sector in Addis Ababa are provided, closely correlating to the findings.

2. Statement of the Problem

Valter Jose Marques da Silva (2014), in the study on impact of service quality in customer satisfaction in a Dublin Hostel - Case Study on National College of Ireland, found that service quality can be used to predict customer satisfaction and based on all factors, the tangibility has the greatest impact on customer satisfaction, which reached $\beta = 0.626$, followed by the dimension assurance with $\beta = 0.133$. The dimension of empathy deserves more attention in the face of other dimensions of service quality in light of the lower level of perception presented. A specific service that is considered as "high-quality" service by one customer may be perceived as low quality by another. Perception can be shaped during a service, but invariably materialize after usage (Mudie & Pirrie, 2006). If customers' expectations are met, service quality was regarded as satisfactory or good; otherwise, it was regarded as unsatisfactory, poor, or deficient. Service quality is the most significant parameter that needs serious attention for an organization to exceed its competitors. Public sector organizations exist to provide services to citizens who are service users; they also serve the private sector and other institutions. It is well known that in most developing countries, including Ethiopia, service quality by public service organization is beset with a lot of challenges (UNDP, 2015).

According to the report from Addis Ababa City Administration Public Complaint Handling Office, the number of complaints had radically increased over time. A significant increase in number of complaints was observed in the previous two consecutive years. According to GSU13 AFRICA (2018), this problem is characterized by poor salary schedule, weak working culture, and weak sense of serving the public, weak reward system, administrative inefficiency, high rate of turnover, role ambiguity, attitude problem, and the prevalence of corruption. In recent times,

Addis Ababa City Administration has implemented the Change Army scenario as a new arrangement to modernize the civil service.

Addis Ababa City Administration (2018) report revealed that the department is facing certain challenges because the entire Civil Servants of the city highly lie on human resource recruitment and administrations at large. However, the above results were based on department reports and work shop documents; and therefore adequate scientific investigations were not conducted particularly the selected sector in the study area. Based on the above fact and findings, it can be seen that larger proportions of customers were dissatisfied by services they gained from the department. Thus, this paper seeks to examine to this problem and identify the root cause of the gap between customer service perception and expectation in Addis Ababa City Administration.

The literature is replete with studies revealing that there is a relationship between users' perception and service quality. The service quality may be evaluated with the use of six service quality dimensions, of which the most useable is the SERVPERC scale. To that end, the conceptual framework and hypotheses to analyse the service quality and user perception in the public service sector of Addis Ababa are depicted below.

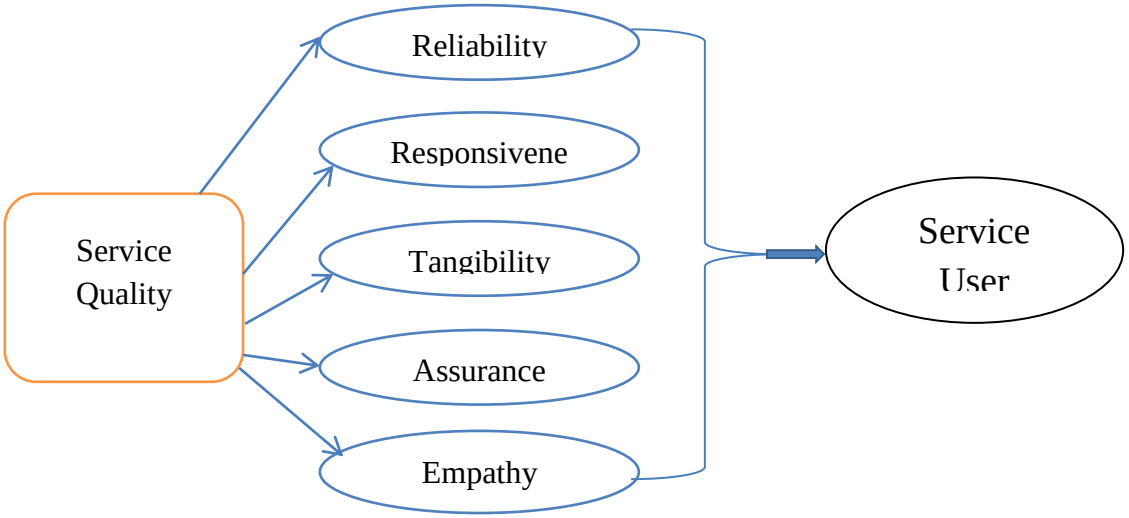

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework of Service Quality on Service User Perception
Adapted from SERVPERC model Parasuraman, (1988)

Addis Ababa City Administration (2018) report revealed that the department is facing certain challenges because the entire civil servants of the city highly misrepresent themselves on human resource recruitment and administrations at large. However, the above results were based on department reports and workshop documents; and adequate scientific investigations were not conducted particularly in the selected sector in the study area. Based on this case, larger proportions of users were dissatisfied by services they received from the department. Thus, this paper seeks to examine and identify the service users' perception and compare between service users' perception and expectation of the service quality in the selected civil service organization.

3. Materials and Methods

Description of the Study Area and Population: The study was conducted government organizations in Addis Ababa City Administration, Ethiopia. Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia and home base for African Unity organization. As an international city, Addis Ababa

serves different public, private, and non-governmental organizations. Of these, this study considers government organizations that provide service quality, check service user perception and expectation gap in the service.

Research Design and Strategy: The study employed used cross-sectional field survey method to assess the level of service user perception on service quality in civil service organizations of Addis Ababa City based on respondents' attitudes. In cross-sectional field survey method, relevant data were collected at public service organizations by distributing questionnaires to service user respondents. Along with the cross-sectional nature of this study, the study employed descriptive research method to analyse the data collected from respondents. It was used to describe or asses the service quality dimensions that would lead to service user perception. It was also used for detail description of the findings displayed in tables, figures, and charts as well as making inferences on the level of service user perception on service quality of public service organizations. In order to acquire the best results, the researcher used the qualitative data way of triangulation. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative method was employed in this research for more adequate results. Mixing different methods can strengthen a study, It would be a great advantage when the findings of one were validated by the other. Therefore, quantitative approaches were used for the data collected from respondents through questionnaires. For the qualitative approaches, data were gathered from interviews (FGD) and secondary sources.

Sampling Techniques: The researcher selected only three public service organizations using purposive sampling technique based on observatory study and most compliant area. These organizations were: Addis Ababa City Transport Authority, Addis Ababa City Land Development and Management, and Federal Document Authentication and Registration Agency. These organizations were selected on the basis of key criteria like high volume of service users, high complaint, and importance in the social and economic setting of the city administration.

The target population of the study was the number of service users who access services in the three selected public service organizations from January 25 to February 25 2021, in Addis Ababa City Administration. The total population was computed from the estimated average number of monthly service users of the selected public service organizations in the pilot study, and then average number of service users was taken on a daily basis for sample size determination purposes. The sample selection was based on inclusion and exclusion criteria of service users who are ages 18 and above as direct interviewees and a minimum of one-time service seekers in the sector were enrolled as interviewees.

Sample Size and Procedure: Sampling methods used were scientific procedures of selecting those sampling units which would provide the required estimator with associated margins of uncertainty arising from examining only a part of the population. In this study, stratified random sampling technique was adopted as an appropriate sampling design for selecting a representative sample of service users. This stratification of a population was categorizing the sampling frame in to non-overlapping and relatively homogenous within groups, but it is heterogeneous between the three different organizations. Once stratified, the sample unit of service users was selected based on simple random sampling method. The required sample size for the study was determined from each stratum. On this case, taking too large a sample implies waste of resources while too small sample reduces the usefulness of the results. Based on Muluken Mengste (2020), a similar study in Dire Dawa, in the estimated and unknown population parameter, the margin of error was $(\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}) = 0.01$, but in our case the sample size was based on stratified sampling of the allowable difference between the estimate and unknown population parameter, $\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$, set to be 0.05

with maximum margin error. A sample of 385 service users was taken based on the above conditions, with the allowable precision of 0.05. The sample size determination formula that was adopted in this study is as follows: (Cochran, 1977 and Al-Subaihi, 2003):

$$n = \frac{(Z_{\alpha/2})^2 p(1-p)}{\varepsilon^2}$$

Where, n: Sample size, Z: Confidence level at 95% (standard value of 1.96), P: Proportion of unknown population (0.50), ε: Allowable error (5%)

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 385$$

The proportional allocation of sample for the three organizations calculated as:

$$n_i = \frac{No.\ of\ service\ user\ per\ day}{Total\ No.of\ service\ user\ in\ the\ three\ organizations}\ x\ 385$$

Due to different reason 8% of the total sample non-response rate was considered and the total distributed sample was 415.

Method of Data Collection: Data was collected through document review, structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD). Documentation involves collecting information and data from existing surveys, reports, journals and relevant publications. The quantitative data used structured questionnaire consisted of 42 items categorized in to five dimensions. Quantitative questionnaire has two major parts which are demographic characteristics of respondents and measure the service user perception processes of the selected public service organizations using SERVPERC model, comprising five components of service quality. The components were Empathy, Responsiveness, Assurance, Tangibility, and Reliability. Qualitative data were generated using different methods including purposive sampling methods and semi-structured interviews conduct using interview guidelines with the selected key informants to obtain more detailed information. In such a way, the researchers were able to probe by raising some related questions for further clarification.

Study variables: the study variables were selected based on some previous studies and those that were expected to be determinants of service user perception in the study area. The response variable was overall reflection on service user perception (Y) which was obtained from its global indicators. The independent variables were classified as socio-demographic variables, and the service user perception on the service quality.

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics (mean values, frequency distribution, tables, graphs, charts, and percentages) were used to analyze the responses of respondents and correlation (measures the strength between the variables). Qualitative analysis was done by narrating the views and themes based on the research objectives, research questions and triangulate with quantitative results. All quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 25). We used multiple linear regression model to examine factors associated with whether service users' perception and service quality had been involved and dependent variable changed into an average value of the computation all dependent value forms. Diagnostics were

omitted from the list of predictor variables due to the low response rate associated with this question in the survey.

4. Results

The research had targeted 415 service user perceptions but in the end, 402 questionnaires were completed successfully, which amounts to 96.87% response rate. The sample distributed in the ten sub-cities in Addis Ababa shown in Table 4.1. 29.9% of the sample was taken from Bole Sub-city, 46% from Land Management, 41.3 % from Road Transport, and 12.7% from Document Authentication (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Sample distributed sub-city

Sub-city	Frequency	Percent (%)
Addis Ketema Sub-city	32	8.0
Arada Sub-city	44	10.9
Akaki Kality Sub-city	19	4.7
Bole Sub-city	120	29.9
Gulele Sub-city	17	4.2
Kolfe Keranyo Sub-city	10	2.5
Kirkos Sub-city	13	3.2
Ldeta Sub-city	32	8.0
Nefas Silke Sub-city	37	9.2
Yeka Sub-city	78	19.4

Table 4.2: Sample distributed organization

Selected organization	Frequency	Percent (%)
Road Transport	166	41.3
Land Management	185	46.0
Document authentication	51	12.7
Total	402	100.0

Demographic profile of respondents

Age and sex composition

63.9% were male and 36.1% were female respondents. The proportional distribution across age group of respondents had shown greater variability. Thus, from the sampled male respondents 7(2.6%), of the respondents were aged below 21 years. In addition, of those completing the survey 125 (46.5%), 74 (27.5%) and 40 (14.9%) of male respondents were between 21-30, 31 – 40 and 41 – 50 years of age, respectively. The remaining 23 (8.6%) of respondents were above 51 years of age. As far as the age distribution of female respondents were concerned, majority 42.9% of female respondents were aged between 21 – 30 and 28.6% whose age groups were between 31 – 40 years. Only 9.8% respondent was aged above 50 years (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Age and sex composition of respondents

Age and sex composition			Age of respondents					Total
			<21	21-30	31-40	41-50	>50	
Sex of respondents	Male	Count	7	125	74	40	23	269
		%	2.6	46.5	27.5	14.9	8.6	63.9
	Female	Count	8	57	38	17	13	133
		%	6.0	42.9	28.6	12.8	9.8	36.1
	Total	Count	15	182	112	57	36	402
		%	3.7	45.3	27.9	14.2	9.0	100

Education and marital status composition

Table 4.3: Education and marital status of respondents

Education and marital status		Frequency	%
Education	Grade 8 and below	167	41.5
	9 —12 complete	177	44.0
	Certificate/diploma	58	14.4
Marital status	Single	164	40.8
	Married	224	55.7
	Widowed	13	3.2
	Divorced	1	0.2

In the combination of marital status and education, 44% of the respondents had completed grades 9—12, 41.5% respondent were in grade 8 and below, and only 14.4% of the respondents held certificates or diplomas. Table 4.3 shows below more than half percent of the respondents were married and most of the respondents had completed grades 9—12.

Occupational status and sex of decomposition

Occupational Status and Sex of Decomposition: As compared to self-employment of service users and their occupational status, there were fewer males than females (18.6%, 37.6%), respectively. In the same manner, respondent service users were government employees both male and female (20.8%, 28.6%), respectively (see Figure 4.1).

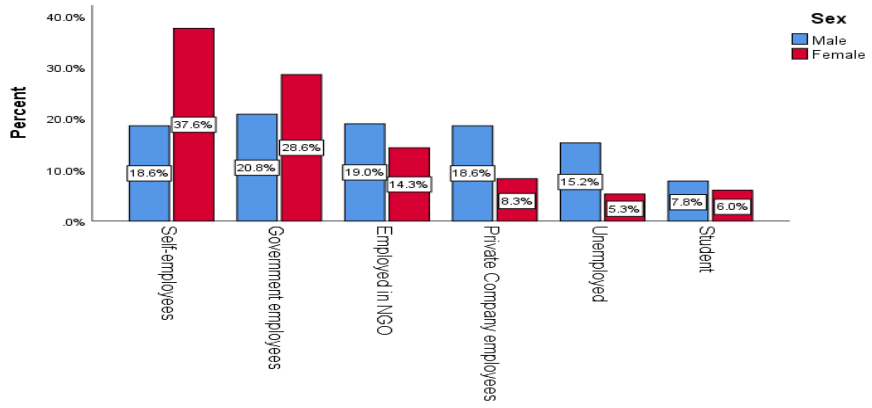

Figure 4.1 Composition of occupation status with sex

Results of service perception and expectation dimensions

The overall compute level of one sample t-test was employed for both perception and expectation of service quality in the dimension. The statistical one sample t-test result revealed that, statistically significant mean difference was observed between the level of tangibility service user perception and expectation dimension at 1% level of significance respectively. The level of tangibility, in both cases was the mean value (M = 2.7276 and 2.6729). The tangibility dimension was analyzed from equipment and technology, physical facilities, appealing staff members and materials perspective elements. This implies that the service perception and expectation dimension from the perspective of tangibility in the study area were not equal. Based on the result further portrayed that service perception dimension from equipment and technology, physical facilities, appearance of staff members and materials had created a higher problem in the study area. Regarding reliability, there was statistically insignificant mean difference between the overall levels of service user perception because of over perceived the service in the city and statistically significant in-service expectation. The mean value (t= -0.393, p>0.05) and (t= 2.530, p<0.05), respectively. This implies that reliability of service user perception dimension was below the service expectation. The mean value of perception (M = 2.9789 and 3.0964) was below the mean value of expectation based on reliability. This implies that service user perception lower reliability than expectation. Reliability measures in terms of provisioning of service in the promised time, employees' interest in solving customer problems, providing the right and error free services in the study area were the major problems regarding reliability perspectives.

Responsiveness measures based on service providers, willingness of staff members to exactly set the time standards as well as existence of willingness and business to help users were major bottlenecks to achieve higher level of responsiveness in the study area. From responsiveness measurements there was statistically significant mean difference between the overall level of responsiveness in service user perception and service expectation at 5% level of significance.

Table 4.4: One sample t-test for the level of service dimension

One-Sample Statistic

Service user perception and expectation dimensions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Test Value = 3		
					t	df	Sig.
Tangible Perception	402	2.7276	.70587	.03521	-7.737	401	.000
Reliability Perception	402	2.9789	1.07895	.05381	-.393	401	.695
Responsiveness Perception	402	3.1308	.85805	.04280	3.057	401	.002
Assurance Perception	402	3.0542	.60517	.03018	1.797	401	.073
Empathy Perception	402	2.9956	.66048	.03294	-.132	401	.895
Tangible Expectation	402	2.6729	.87228	.04351	-7.519	401	.000
Reliability Expectation	402	3.0964	.76382	.03810	2.530	401	.012
Responsiveness Expectation	402	2.6836	.73906	.03686	-8.584	401	.000
Assurance Expectation	402	3.1657	.91489	.04563	3.631	401	.000
Empathy Expectation	402	3.0541	1.05360	.05255	1.030	401	.304

There was statistically significant mean difference was observed between the overall level of assurance expectation (t = 3.631, p < 0.01) and insignificant in-service user perception (t =

1.797, $p > 0.05$). Based on the mean result service user perception was below the expectation dimension mean value (M = 3.0542 and 3.1657), respectively. As far as assurance was concerned, lack of confidence, failure to give individual attention for customers and lack of consistency in responses were the major problems related with assurance in the study area. Finally, there was statistically insignificant mean difference between the overall level of empathy in both in perception and expectation at five percent level of significance (see Table 4.4).

Relationship between service qualities on user dimension

The researcher recorded the group mean rates for empathy, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance rating scores**.** Initially, check the existence of linear relationship between response and explanatory variable.

The correlations between tangible quality service perception dimension and service user expectation were positive and statistically significant ($r_p = 0.147$, $r_e = 0.228$). This means that as tangible service increase, both service user perception and expectation also increased. The direction of relationship indicated that tangible service has a moderate level of relationship with the level of service user perception and expectation.

Strong positive relationship was observed for empathy, the direction, and the magnitude of service user perception in their respective orders, the existing service user perception and expectation dimensions has r = 0.424 and 0.609 directly relation between service user perception and expectation (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Relationship of service user perception and expectation results

Spearman (rho) Correlation	**Service user perception**	**Service user expectation**
Tangible	0.147**	0.228**
Reliability	0.300**	0.049
Responsiveness	0.436**	0.393**
Assurance	0.382**	0.627**
Empathy	0.424**	0.609**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The effect of service quality on service users perception

Test of regression assumptions: Before conducting the linear regression model the major assumptions such as linearity, normality, multi-collinearity, and homoscedasticity tests were conducted, in fact our data were liker compute to continuous forms.

Normality of the data: The overall distribution is presented with the histogram residual and the P-P plot correlated with the data in the Figure 4.3 and 4.4. The histogram below compares the distribution of the residuals to normal distribution curve. From the figure appended, it can be seen that the frequencies of the residuals are close to the curve. This indicated that, the distribution of the residuals was normal. And thus, the assumption of normality was not extremely violated. On the other hand, the P-P plot results from the figure, the observed cumulative probabilities of the residuals are close to the line. This also indicated that the distribution of the residuals was close to the normal distribution. This infers that the data has not been violated by the assumption of normality (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4).

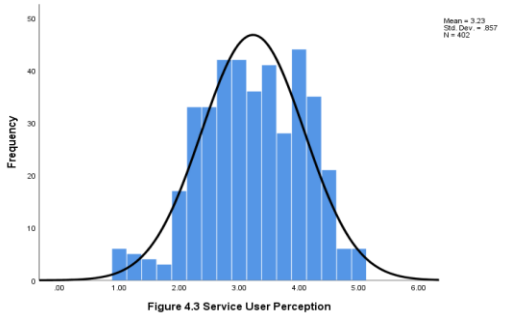

Figure 4.3 Service User Perception

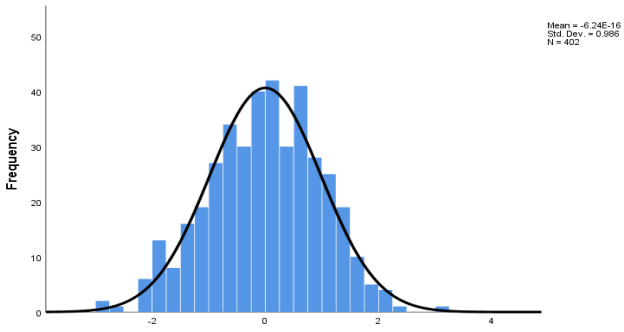

Figure 4.3 Regression Standardized Residual

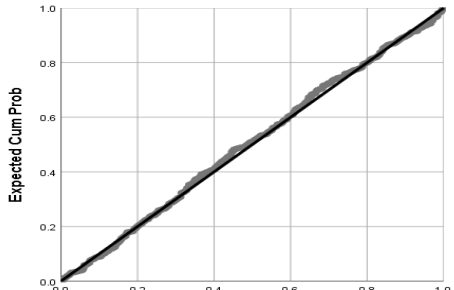

Figure 4.4 Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

The effects of service dimensions on customer satisfactions

The regression analysis was conducted to identify the independent predictors of service user perception quality dimensions and its impact on service user perception in the study area. The independent variables, such as tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy, and its implication on service user perception were evaluated. The overall model fit for regression equation was determined by ANOVA. The model reveals statistically significant relationship ($F = 20.192$, $P < 0.01$). This result indicates that at least one independent variable was statistically significant effect on service user perception of service quality. The independent variables such as empathy, tangibility, reliability, assurance, and responsiveness dimension

together accounted for 36.3 % of variance in the dependent variable of service user perception (see Table 4.6 & 4.7).

Table 4.6: Regression model summery

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.602	0.363	0.345	0.69361

Table 4.7: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	106.858	11	9.714	20.192	.000
Residual	187.627	390	.481		
Total	294.485	401			

Regression model results

The overall model result indicated that, the interaction of empathy, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance with the dependent variable is expressed with its corresponding model coefficients and the result is presented as follows. From the regression result, three service dimensions (such as responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) were statistically significant predictors of service user perception with the ($p < 0.05$), whereas tangible and reliability were found to be statistically insignificant in the study. The model result revealed that responsiveness has significant impact on service user perception. This finding revealed that, the existence of responsiveness in service user perception significantly ($p<0.01$) affects the level of service user perception positively in the study area. The responsiveness coefficient result has also shown that, this type of service quality dimension has a positive relation with service user perception ($\beta = .357, t = 5.821$). Thus, the higher the presence of responsiveness service quality, the higher the service user perception level would be achieved. This implies that, service user perception level is increased in increased levels of responsiveness service quality was exercised.
Similarly, assurance during service quality has significant impact on the level of service user perception. This study also revealed that the prevalence of assurance during service quality significantly ($p < 0.05$) affected the level of service user perception in the study. Moreover, the assurance coefficient result has shown that, service quality dimension has a positive and significant relation with the level of service user perception ($\beta = 0.191,\ t = 2.694$). Result of this, the more the prevalence of service quality assurance, the higher level of service user perception in the dimension. This implies that, service user perception will be increased because of assurance during service quality was guaranteed by 0.191 times better than the initial service. The literature also supported the findings of this study. Bekele (1998), Wogayehu and Drake (2003) in their studies in different parts of Ethiopia found that there is an association between the existence of assurance during service quality and the level of service user perception. In addition, Habtamu (2006) confirmed that the higher the existence of assurance in service quality, the higher the level of service user perception observed. The same result was also found in Philippines by Lapar and Pandey (2009).

Finally, the model result revealed that empathy has also significant impact on service user perception. The existence of empathy in service quality significantly ($p<0.01$) affects the level of

service user perception. The empathy coefficient result has also shown that, this type of service quality dimension has a positive relation with service user perception ($\beta = 0.369,\ t = 5.953$). This result indicates that, the higher the presence of empathy service quality observed, the higher the service user perception level would be achieved. From coefficient of empathy implies that, service user perception level is increased in a better empathy service quality was exercised (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: Regression results coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	.733	.231		3.169	.002
Tangible Perception	-.061	.060	-.050	-1.015	.311
Reliability Perception	-.048	.051	-.061	-.943	.346
Responsiveness Perception	.357	.061	.357	5.821	.000
Assurance Perception	.191	.071	.135	2.694	.007
Empathy Perception	.369	.062	.285	5.953	.000

5. Conclusions

The research had targeted 415 respondents but at the end of data collection 402 questionnaires were completed successfully which leads to a response rate of 96.88%. The findings of the study indicated that, self-employed had more response than the other service user in the occupational status of male was less than female (18.6%, 37.6%), respectively. Multiple linear regression model was explain in service users' quality of perception such as empathy, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and assurance in Addis Ababa City Administration. The independent variables such as empathy, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and assurance together accounted for 36.3 % of variation or explained in the dependent variable of service user perception. Empathy, responsiveness and assurance were statistically significant factors for service user perception. The lower quality or insignificant service in tangibility and reliability was mainly affected by the presence of lower quality in physical facilities, equipment & technology and appealing staff members & materials. As a recommendation, more improved level of responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Concerned bodies of the government officials shall endeavor to design well-established and updated physical facilities, equipment, and technologies around the office. The concerned bodies should critically consider and solve the main problems of tangibility of user perception.

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