



## **AN INVESTIGATION OF SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS IN THE DELIVERY OF SATISFIED SERVICES TO CUSTOMERS IN THE DOMESTIC AIRLINES INDUSTRY IN GHANA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates SERVQUAL Dimensions in the delivery of satisfied services in the domestic airline industry in Ghana. Questionnaires were distributed to four hundred and fifty (450) customers from three domestic airlines namely Antrak Air, Fly 540 and Star Bow using the convenience sampling technique. The responses from the field indicate that domestic airlines operating in Ghana fall short in their adoption of SERVQUAL model to deliver quality services to their customers. According to the findings of this study, domestic airlines in Ghana are regarded by majority of the respondents as not being reliable, responsive, showing sense of assurance, empathy and tangible in all their operations. The same majority of respondents also indicated that the airlines fall short in adopting best practices of service quality.*

**Keywords:** Serqual, Domestic airlines, Customers, Ghana.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the “age of customer”, delivering quality service is considered an essential strategy for success and survival in today’s competitive environment (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Dawkins and Reichheld, 1990; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). Service quality as a global business issue and concept has attracted much attention from a lot of researchers all over the world. In this sense, understanding, creating, communicating, and delivering customer value and satisfaction are at the very heart of modern marketing practice. There is an assumption that holds in both the academia and modern business parlance is that the customer, rather than marketing, is at the center of modern business philosophy, and customer service satisfaction is central to the success or performance of customer focused organizations in which domestic airlines in Ghana are no exception.

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) are of the view that in the services industry with specific reference to the airlines, the distinctive features of services require that managers understand customer needs and expectations, and keep promises made to them. Kotler (2000) on the contrary contend that most companies do not recognize the importance of this approach until driven to it by circumstances.

Passengers of airlines like other customers' expectations as evidenced in other service sectors are among the core factors that seek to influencing the service decisions of airlines found in every market.

Empirical evidence has indicated that successes expected in customer-focused service development requires a deeper understanding of customer needs, expectations, and preferences (Gustafsson *et al.*, 1999) and that marketing strategies adopted and implemented by airlines to expand internationally must consider different expectations and perceptions of classes of passengers (Sultan and Simpson, 2000). Significant body of research has focused on the measurement of service quality in conventional services (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Bolton and Drew, 1991). SERVQUAL theorized by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) and SERVPERF, proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) are the examples of scales, which have been developed to measure service quality in such contexts. However, further research has identified additional dimensions of service quality besides those extracted in SERVQUAL and SERVPERF (Levesque and McDougall, 1996; Brady and Cronin, 2001).

Parasuraman *et al.*, (2005); Collier and Bienstock (2006) maintain that, with the rise of technology-enabled services, research is also continuously laying emphasis on the technology related dimensions of service quality. From the view of Parasuraman *et al.* (2005) E-S-QUAL is an example of one such scale receiving critical attention in the era of delivering technology enabling services. In this context too, further research works showed that there exist additional dimensions of service quality (Joseph and Stone, 2003; Collier and Bienstock, 2006). Also, self service technology (SST) and call centers are increasingly being used for service delivery and hence impacting the customers' perceptions of overall service quality (Dean, 2002; Curran and Meuter, 2005).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cronin and Taylor (1992) throw lights on the role services play in the lives of people and hence becoming increasingly impactful to the GDPs of many parts of the world: the economic share of services currently accounts for more than half the sum of all GNPs worldwide.

Furthermore, as services and service establishments increase in number and in type, customer groups are also becoming more demanding in their expectations regarding services delivery by players in the industry. The main reasons that account for this lie principally in the demographics of modern day consumers and the type of environments they are exposed to. Relating to this specifically, the modern day consumers have increased disposable incomes and are

daily increasing their knowledge on services provision, which in all gained through experience and exposure to different forms of advertising or media. At the same time, they are becoming increasingly dependent on service, and increased pricing has made them more value conscious (Barrington and Olsen, 1987). One main challenge that is plaguing service industries in modern times is that, the players in the industry have not always responded satisfactorily to the demands of customers for improvement due to factors such as inadequacy of management, through accelerated growth, shortages in the supply of labour, a lack of training and high staff turnover, and the inadequacy of the reward system in service industries. Beyond this, the advancement of technology that has made computerization of businesses possible has also led to an impersonalization of service – another reason for the failure to deliver good service (Barrington and Olsen, 1987).

The emergence of competition and its increase, makes the delivering of better services seem ever more important. Also, the highly imitable nature of the tangibles that service firms adopt makes it crucial to put more emphasis on the role of service as a differentiating characteristic (Pickworth (1987) in every thriving or promising economy. But the mind boggling question that needs to be answered by all is; what is this term called service? Making an attempt to identifying the underlying dimensions of the service quality construct and the relative importance of these dimensions in consumer evaluation of specific service situations is the first step in defining the term service – and hence its provision – with regards to quality standards (service quality). In a sense, it needs to be submitted here that developing and adopting a multi-attribute index based on these dimensions with their respective weights would be instrumental in measuring the trends in consumer assessments of service quality in general, or for some services in particular. Such an index is potentially essential for three reasons: one is to help segment the consumer markets in the midst of innumerable factors; two, to measure the variances always existing between certain service establishments and their customer groupings; and lastly, to pinpoint the strong and weak points of each establishment with respect to the quality of service provided in quantifiable terms.

From the reasons above, the current study sought to do a thorough investigation into service quality dimensions in the domestic airline industry in Ghana. The general purposes of the study were to answer the following research questions: (1). How can the satisfaction level of customers in the Ghanaian domestic airlines be measured using the SERVQUAL Dimensions? (2) What constitute the various Service- Quality Management practices adopted by the domestic airlines in Ghana?

### **2.1. SERVQUAL Model / Dimensions of Service Quality**

Lewis and Booms (1983) assume that service quality is an overall assessment of service by customers. This becomes a key decision criterion in evaluating service in terms of standards by customers. Service quality is defined as a comparison between consumer expectations of service and consumer perceptions of the service level provided (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Voss *et al.*, 1998;

Kotler and Keller, 2005). In agreeing with the work of the above authors, Hinson (2005) maintained that the concept as seen as a key factor in customers' determination of delight compares perceptions to what consumers should expect from a firm and how well the firm performs in delivering the service.

The perceived service quality is believed to be resulting from comparison between customers' prior expectations about the service and their perceptions after actual experience (Asubonteng *et al.*, 1996). Besides, features of service provisions such as its outcomes, its quality perceptions all summed up to involve the evaluation of the delivery process (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). It is from this line of argument that compel Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) to suggest that the conceptualization of service quality ought to include both the process as well as the service outcomes.

Customers all over the world, form service expectations from many sources, such as past experiences, and word of mouth advertising. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) posits that if the perceived service falls below the expected service, customers are disappointed. There is a general assumption that if the perceived service meets or exceeds the customers' expectations, they are apt to use the service provider again. Successful companies add certain benefits to their offering that not only satisfy customers but surprise and delight them. A delighted customer is a matter of exceeding expectations.

Based on a focus group research conducted by Valarie Zeithaml, Leonard Berry, and A. Parasuraman, identified the following 10 criteria used by customers in evaluating service quality (Lovell and Wirtz, 2007). Credibility: This refers to features like trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider. Security: This involves features like freedom from danger, risk, or doubt. Access: Also includes approachable and ease of contact. Communication: encompasses activities such as listening to customers and keeping them informed in language they can understand. Understanding: This has to do with making the effort to know customers and their needs. Tangibles: This dimension refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. Reliability: The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. Responsiveness: This refers to the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. Competence: Like other criteria, deals with the possession of the needed skills and knowledge required by service employees to perform the service. Courtesy: Also means politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel.

In subsequent research, the researchers found a high degree of correlation between several of these variables and so consolidated them into five based dimensions. According to the researchers, these dimensions will help measure customer satisfaction with various aspects of service quality. A survey research instrument called SERVQUAL was developed by the researchers to identify the various aspects or dimensions of service quality (Kotler, 2003; Hinson, 2005; Kotler and Keller, 2005; Lovell and Wirtz, 2007) which includes:

- Dimension of Reliability- This involves the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. This can be successful by providing service as promised, dependability in handling customers' service problems and maintain error-free records.
- Dimension of Responsiveness- This refers to willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. This can be possible by keeping customer informed as to when services will be performed providing prompt service to customers and readiness to respond to customers' requests.
- Dimension of Assurance- This deals with the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. This can be achieved if the company is able to instill confidence in its customers and making customers feel safe in the transactions.
- Dimension of Empathy- In the dimension of service delivery, it refers to the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers. It also means giving customers individual attention, dealing with customers in a caring fashion, having the customer's best interest at heart and providing convenient business hours to customers.
- Tangibles- The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. Also, the following can ensure its enhancement: Modern equipment; Visually appealing facilities; Employees who have neat, professional appearance; and Visually appealing materials associated with the service.

From the discussions above the current researchers put forward that the concept of service quality dimensions throw lights on the extent at which service firms being considered as marketing-led or customer-focused can be evaluated or appraised on the extent at which they perform their services effectively and more efficiently using the SERVQUAL model or five dimensions as a benchmark.

## **2.2. Best Practices adopted by Service-Quality Management practitioners**

Various studies have shown that well managed service companies share the following common practices (Kotler, 2003; Kotler and Keller, 2005):

- Practising Strategic Concept: Most top service companies are considered "customer obsessed." This means that they have clear sense of their target customers and their needs. They have developed distinctive strategies for satisfying these needs.
- Top management commitment: managements of such organizations should look not only the financial performance on monthly basis, but also at service performance. They should insist on continually measuring each outlet's performance to QSCV: Quality, Service, Cleanliness and Value.
- Practising high standards: This implies that the best service providers set high service-quality standards. High standards set organizations aim to answer phone calls within 10 seconds and customer letters within 2 days. The standards must be set appropriately

high. A service company can differentiate itself by designing better and faster delivery systems. There are three levels of differentiation which are reliability, resilience and innovativeness.

Many distribution experts say that a company's money would be better spent on improving delivery performance than advertising. They say that superior service performance is more effective differentiator than image expenditures. Further it is difficult for a competitor to duplicate a superior distribution system than to copy an advertising campaign.

- **Self-Service Technology (SSTs):** As in the case of products, consumers value convenience in services. Many person-to-person service interactions are being replaced by SSTs. To the traditional vending machines we can add ATMs, self-pumping at gas stations, self-checkout at hotels, self-ticket purchasing on the internet, and self-customization of products on the internet. It needs to emphasise that not all SSTs improve service quality, but they have the potential of making service transactions more accurate, convenient, and faster. Every company needs to think about improving its SSTs. Companies would be smart to enable customers to call the company when they need more information than the SST provides. Online hotel reservation, websites often include "call me" button. If the customer clicks on it, a service rep will immediately phone the person to answer a question.
- **Monitoring systems:** Top firms audit service performance, both their own and competitors, and on a regular basis. Additionally, They gather voice of the customer (VOC) measurements to probe customer satisfiers and dissatisfies. Other strategies adopted to constitute monitoring of systems include the use of comparison shopping, ghost shopping, customer surveys, suggestion and complaint forms, service-audit teams, and letters to the president. They can employ a weekly Performance Measurement Programme charting its performance on a large number of customer-sensitive issues. Such organization will take action whenever performance falls below the minimum acceptable level. It also raises its performances goal over time.
- **Mystery shoppers-** The use of undercover shoppers who are paid to report back to the company – is now a big business in the USA. There are other options to adopt to help in the judging of Services such as the customer importance and company performance. Importance performance analysis is used to rate the various elements of the service bundle and identify what actions required.
- **Satisfying customer complaints:** Customers whose complaints are systematically resolved often become loyal customers than customers who were never dissatisfied. About 34 percent of customers who register major complaints will buy again from the company if their complaint is resolved quickly, between 25 percent for minor complaints. As the adage goes, "Every complaint is a gift if handled well." Companies that encourage

disappointed customers to complain – and also empower employees to remedy the situation on the spot – have been shown to achieve higher revenues and greater profits than companies that do not have a systematic approach to addressing service failures. Research has shown that customers evaluate complaint incidents in terms of the outcomes they receive, the procedures used to arrive at those outcomes, and the nature of the inter-personal treatment during the process. Getting front-line employees to adopt extra-role behaviours and to advocate the interests and image of the firm to customers can be a critical asset in handling complaints. Companies also are increasing the quality of their call centers and their customer service representatives (CSRs). Handling Phone calls more efficiently can improve service, reduce complaints, and extend customer longevity.

- Satisfying Employees are well as customers: Excellent service companies know that positive employee attitudes will improve and promote customer loyalty. Given the importance of positive employee attitude, service companies must attract the best employees they can find. They need to market a career rather just a job. Another strategy is that marketers must design a sound training programme and provide support and rewards for good performance. They can use the intranet, internal newsletter, daily reminders and employee roundtables to reinforce customer-centric attitudes.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is described as a general plan of how the researcher goes about answering the research question(s) of the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The mixed-method technique was employed in this study, thus, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed.

Combining qualitative and quantitative data ensured effectiveness of the research process as one can enhance the findings of the other. This study adopted a case study strategy. Multiple verses holistic case study was adopted to establish whether the findings of one case occur in other cases and as consequences, the need to generalize from the findings. Yin (2003) asserts that, multiple case studies may be preferable to a single case study because it helps to gain a rich understanding of service quality dimensions in the domestic airline companies in Ghana. Primary and secondary sources of data were gathered for this study. A structured questionnaire and interview were used to collect the primary data. Questionnaires were distributed to the customers of the three companies, Antrak Air, Fly 540 and Star Bow by the assistance of staff of the marketing department of the three companies. In all, 450 customers responded to the questionnaires. The questionnaires enabled the researchers to get first hand information for the study. The secondary data consisted of already existing information collected by other researchers and they are easier to use because of their already existence, and therefore they are often used often.

#### 4. RESULTS

In this section, passengers of the three airlines were asked to tick as many as possible expected investigated item(s) for a question on the questionnaire. The number of investigated items selected by respondents (figures found in the bracket = nx) were divided by the total number of questionnaires retrieved, that is one hundred and fifty (150) each multiplied by 100 to get the valid percent for each airline(=y); given by the formular  $\frac{nx}{150} \times 100 = y$ . This has been followed by finding the mean of the percentages for the three airlines to get the average percent (ap) given its formular  $\frac{\sum y_{1,2,3}}{3} = ap$ .

##### 4.1. Reliability

**Table-2.** Indicating YES /NO responses of the fact that the airlines are reliable

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
YES	32.0% [48]	18.6% [28]	45.3% [68]	23.6%
NO	65.3% [98]	79.3% [119]	52.6% [79]	65.7%

##### Field Report 2013

Table 2 above indicates that 65.7% of the respondents responded NO to the question, “do you agree to the fact that the airline provides quality services to customers” as against 23.6% responses that went for YES.

**Table-3.** Indicating the actual responses of reliability in the airlines

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
Provision of service as promised in terms of service time, quality, right charge etc.	24.0% [36]	28.6% [43]	19.3% [29]	23.6%
Shows dependability in handling customers' problems accurately	25.3% [38]	27.3% [41]	24.0% [36]	25.5%
Maintain error- free records for customers	32.0% [48]	18.0% [27]	20.6% [31]	23.3%

##### Field Report 2013

From table 3, it is indicated that 23.6% of the respondents said all the three airlines do not provide service as promised; 25.5% of them also said the three airlines are not dependable in handling customers' problems accurately whereas 23.3% claim that the airlines do not maintain error-free records for customers.



#### 4.2. Responsiveness

“Do you agree to the fact that the airline is responsiveness in the services provided to you as a customer?”

**Table-4.** Indicating YES / NO responses of the fact that the airlines are responsive

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
YES	43.3% [65]	19.3% [29]	17.3% [26]	26.6%
NO	52.6% [79]	80.6% [121]	79.3% [119]	70.8%

#### Field Report 2013

Table 4 above indicates that 70.8% of the respondents responded NO to the question, “do you agree to the fact that the airline is responsive to the needs of its customers” as against 26.6% responses that went for YES.

**Table-5.** Indicating the actual responses of responsiveness in the airlines

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
Keeps you informed as to when services will be performed.	39.3% [59]	43.3% [65]	52.2% [78]	44.9%
Provides prompt service to customers.	22.6% [34]	14.0% [21]	21.3% [32]	19.3%
Employees show willingness to help customers when the need arises.	28.6% [43]	38.0% [57]	43.3% [65]	36.6%
Employees show readiness to respond to customers' requests.	30.0% [45]	26.6% [40]	38.0% [57]	31.5%

#### Field Report 2013

The data presented on table 5 indicate that 44.9% of the respondents said the airlines keep them informed as to when services will be performed; 19.3% also said the airlines do not provide prompt services to customers; 36.6% of the respondents do not agree that the employees show willingness to help customers when the need arises whereas 31.5% claimed that employees do not show readiness to respond to customer's needs.

**Table-6.** Indicating YES /NO responses of the fact that passengers are assured of the airlines services.

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
YES	23.3% [35]	17.3% [26]	10.6% [16]	17.06%
NO	76.6% [115]	80.6% [121]	87.3% [131]	81.5%

**Field report 2013**

Table 6 above indicates that 81.5% of the respondents responded NO to the question, do you agree to the fact that the airline provides quality services to customers” as against 17.06% responses that were recorded for YES.

**Table-7.** Indicating actual responses of assurance in the airlines

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
Employees are consistently courteous towards customers.	25.3% [38]	28.6% [43]	31.3% [47]	28.4%
Employees have the ability to convey trust and confidence in customers.	30.0% [45]	27.3% [41]	24.0% [36]	27.1%
Employees make customers feel safe in transactions.	28.0% [42]	18.6% [28]	26.0% [39]	24.2%

**Field Report 2013**

The data presented on table 7 indicate that 28.4% of the respondents said employees are consistently courteous towards customers; 27.1% of the respondents said employees of the airlines have ability to convey trust and confidence in passengers whereas 24.2% asserted that employees make passengers feel safe in transactions.

**Table-8.** Indicating YES /NO responses of the fact that the airlines are empathic to the needs of the passengers

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
YES	31.3% [47]	40.9% [41]	26.0% [39]	32.7%
NO	45.3% [68]	70.0% [105]	74.0% [111]	63.1%

**Field Report 2013**

Table 8 above indicates that 63.1% of the respondents responded NO to the question, do you agree to the fact that the airline provides quality services to customers” as against 32.7% responses that were recorded for YES.

**Table-9.** Indicating the actual constituents of what make the airlines empathic

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
Employees give customers individual attention.	18.0% [27]	23.3% [35]	32.6% [49]	24.6%
Employees understand the needs of the customers.	23.3% [35]	25.3% [38]	29.3% [44]	25.9%
Employees deal with customers in a caring fashion in terms of solving their problems.	24.6% [37]	25.3% [38]	27.3% [41]	25.7%
Convenient business hours.	14.0% [21]	12.0% [18]	12.6% [19]	12.8%

**Field Report 2013**

The data on table 9 indicate that 24.6% of the respondents said employees give passengers individual attention; 25.9% said that employees understand the needs of the passengers; 25.7% of the total respondents said employees deal with customers in caring fashion; and 12.8% assert that the airlines have convenient business hours.

**Table-10.** Indicating YES /NO responses of the fact that the airlines have tangible facilities

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
YES	23.3% [35]	17.3% [26]	10.6% [16]	17.06%
NO	76.6% [115]	80.6% [121]	87.3% [131]	81.5%

**Field Report 2013**

Table 10 above indicates that 81.5% of the respondents responded NO to the question, do you agree to the fact that the airline provides quality services to customers” as against 17.06% responses that were recorded for YES.

**Table-11.** Indicating the actual tangible facilities of the airlines

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
The Airline has attractive facilities	16.0% [24]	32.6% [49]	35.3% [53]	27.9%
The service information or communication materials are easy to understand	60.6% [91]	76.6% [115]	82.6% [124]	73.2%
The airline has modern equipment in terms of its flights.	23.3% [35]	25.3% [38]	28.6% [43]	25.7%
The overall facilities are considered visually appealing.	19.3% [29]	23.3% [35]	30.0% [45]	24.2%
Employees have neat and professional appearance.	52.6% [79]	62.0% [93]	77.3% [116]	63.9%

**Field Report 2013**

The data found on table 11 indicate that 27.9% of the respondents said that the airlines do not have attractive facilities; 73.2% also said that the service information or communications materials are easy to understand; 25.7% of the respondents said the airlines have modern equipment; 24.2% said the overall facilities are not considered visually appealing whereas 63.9% also said employees have neat and professional appearance.

**Table-12.** Indicating YES /NO responses regarding the adoption of Best Practices of Service-Quality Management by the airlines

Investigated Item(s)	Fly 540	Antrak Air	StarBow	Average percent
YES	23.3% [35]	17.3% [26]	10.6% [16]	17.06%
NO	58.6% [88]	62.0% [93]	87.3% [131]	69.3%

**Field Report 2013**

Table 12 above indicates that 69.3% of the respondents responded NO to the question, do you agree to the fact that the airline provides quality services to customers” as against 17.06% responses that were recorded for YES.

**Table-13.** Indicating the actual responses regarding the adoption of Best Practices of Service-Quality Management by the airlines

Investigated item(s)	Fly 540	Antra k Air	StarBow	Average percent
Strategic Concept developing distinctive strategies for satisfying customers’ needs	38.6% [58]	50.6 [76]	35.3 [53]	29.7
Top management commitment	57.3 [86]	46.6 [70]	45.3 [68]	49.7
High standards	38.6 [58]	32.0 [48]	52.0 [78]	40.8
Self-Service Technology (SSTs)	74.6 [112]	65.3 [98]	86.6 [130]	75.5
Monitoring systems	42.0 [63]	36.6 [54]	38.6 [58]	39.06
Satisfying customer complaints	29.3 [44]	22.6 [34]	28.0 [42]	26.6
Satisfying Employees as well as customers	80.6 [121]	79.3 [119]	76.0 [114]	78.6

**Field Report 2013**

The data found on the above table indicate that 29.7% of the respondents said that the airlines employ strategic concept to developing distinctive strategies for satisfying customers’ needs; 49.7% agreed top management commitment; 40.8% recorded for high standards; 75.5% also recorded for Self-Service Technologies; 39.06% represented monitoring systems; 26.6% represented satisfying customer complaints and finally, 78.6% represented satisfying customer employees as well as customers.

**5. DISCUSSIONS**

The extent to which the respondents responded to the expected responses provided on the questionnaire indicates that the three domestic airlines in Ghana are falling short towards the

delivering of their services along the SERVQUAL dimensions. The following discussions support these stands.

### **5.1. Dimensions of Reliability**

On dimension of reliability, it was indicated that the airlines are not reliable since minority of the respondents are in support of its constituents that is, 23.6% of the respondents said they provide service as promised; 25.5% of them also said the three domestic airlines are dependable in handling customers' problems accurately whereas 23.3% claim that the airlines maintain error-free records for customers. Other challenges passengers face to prevent the airlines from being reliable are: not being on-time as promised and convenient flight schedules are not provided.

### **5.2. Dimensions of Responsiveness**

From the field it is reported that 44.9% of the respondents saying the airlines keep them informed as to when services will be performed, 19.3% also saying the airlines provide prompt services to customers; 36.6% saying employees show willingness to help customers when the need arises whereas 31.5% claimed that employees show readiness to respond to customer request. Other information given by respondents apart from those provided on the questionnaire with respect to responsiveness include: not being prompt and accurate regarding reservation and ticketing and baggage delivery. From the above reasons, it can be concluded that the airlines in Ghana are reliable in their service delivery to the passengers. This was supported by 70.8% of the majority responding to NO to the question "do you agree to the fact that the airlines can be considered responsive in their service delivery to the passengers".

### **5.3. Dimensions of Assurance**

From the data collected from the field, it is indicated that 28.4% of the respondents said employees are consistently courteous towards customers; 27.1% of the respondents said employees of the airlines have the ability to convey trust and confidence in passengers whereas 24.2% asserted that employees make passengers feel safe in transactions. The following responses in terms of percentages indicate that minority of the passengers contacted on the field maintained that the airlines provide services in tandem with giving them assurance. Some of the employees are not in the position and with knowledge to answer passenger's questions or queries. Judging from the YES / NO responses of the fact that the passengers are assured of services provided by the airlines, it was recorded that 81.5% represented YES as against 17.06% as NO.

### **5.4. Dimensions of Empathy**

On the dimension of the airlines being empathic to the needs of the passengers, the data from the field indicate that 24.6% of the respondents said employees give passengers individual attention; 25.9% said that employees understand the needs of the passengers; 25.7 of the total

respondents said employees deal with customers in caring fashion; and 12.8% assert that the airlines have convenient business hours. Keen interest in solving problems (flight cancellation, baggage loss, etc.); absence of safety records; imposing huge fees for overweight baggage; majority disagreeing to employees giving passengers personal attention and lastly majority of the employees are not willing to solve problems faced by passengers with regards to experiencing the service. This was supported by 63.1% saying NO as against 32.7% YES as responses to the question; do the airlines be considered as empathic to solving passenger's problems."

### **5.5. Dimensions of Tangibles**

The various data collected from the field survey indicate that 27.9% of the respondents said that the airlines do not have attractive facilities; 73.2% also said that the service information or communications materials are easy to understand; 25.7% said the airlines have modern equipment; 24.2% said the overall facilities are not considered visually appealing whereas 63.9% also said employees have neat and professional appearance. Other information from the field apart from what were provided on the questionnaires, the following came from respondents themselves that do not side with the view that the airlines have tangible facilities. These include not having modern aircraft and up-to-date in-flight facility. Others include noisy aircrafts; poor frequent flyer programmes; poor seating and legroom space; poor in-flight entertainment services (like books, newspapers, magazines, movies etc.) not providing seats that passengers prefer; unspacious parking lots and business areas for the airlines; and meals service are not provided. Little wonder 81.5% of the responses were recorded for NO as against 17.06% as YES to answer the question; do the airlines have tangible facilities?"

It can be concluded finally from the above discussions that majority of the respondents contacted from the field are not in agreement that the airline companies deliver their service in conjunction with complete adoption of the SERVQUAL dimensions posits by Lewis and Booms (1983); Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) ; Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991). Kotler and Keller (2005) and Hinson (2005).

### **5.6. Best Practices of Service-Quality Management adopted by practitioners in the domestic airline industry.**

On the issue of best practices of Service-Quality Management employed by the airlines; the data from the field indicate that 29.7% of the respondents said that the airlines employ strategic concept to developing distinctive strategies for satisfying customers' needs; 49.7% agreed to top management commitment; 40.8% recorded for high standards; 75.5% also recorded for Self-Service Technologies; 39.06% represented monitoring systems; 26.6% represented satisfying customer complaints and finally, 78.6% represented satisfying customer employees as well as customers. From the above discussions, it can be inferred that apart from the provision of SSTs and satisfying customer complaints, only minority of the respondents are in agreement with the

works of Kotler (2003); Kotler and Keller (2005) with regards to Best Practices of Service-Quality Management employed by the airlines. This was supported by 69.3% of the respondents saying NO as against 17.06% saying YES to the fact that the airlines employ best practices of service quality management.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Management of all the domestic airlines in Ghana have significant role to play in delivering service quality to their customers. These include acting as change agents by planning and implementing change management process by empowering employees to have the belief that they have the ability to take on more responsibility and authority than has traditionally been given to them and that heightened productivity and a better quality of work life will result. This study did not cover all the conceptual frameworks that can be used to evaluate quality of service such as the 22 point scale of service quality, SERVPERF and the gaps model. It is in this regard therefore that the authors recommend that further research can be conducted to test the validity of such models or conceptual frameworks in other industry. Secondly, the same five dimensions of the service quality should be used by future researchers to investigate the extent at which service firms from different industries adopt the SERQUAL Model to deliver quality service to their customers, since this current one was based on three firms in the same industry.

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