



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF ELECTORAL PROCESS IN GHANA:
A CASE OF TAMALE METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to assess the perception of quality of the electoral process in Ghana using the Tamale Metropolis as a case study. This was achieved by measuring and comparing the expectations and perceptions of voters using the SERVQUAL scores. 179 voters responded to the questionnaires used in the survey. The results showed that voters' expectations about quality election were very high. The voters' perception on the performance of the electoral commission was also found to be below their expectations. The study recommended improvements across all the five dimensions.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times, administration of elections has come under public and international scrutiny. National elections are subjected to and assessed by international standards. The United Nations (UN) norms and standards for elections for example, have been developed to guide institutions in the conduct of elections. There is also an official recognition of elections as a "process" rather than an "event" by development agencies (Thomas, 2009). Moreover, the choice of who gets elected into where is determined in a credible, free and fair electoral process (Moses, 2011). This "paradigm shift" towards elections has taken root. Furthermore, the international community is becoming more critical of the quality of electoral processes. In most cases, they rely on the international standards of fairness of the electoral processes as the major approach to legitimize governance. Moreover, recent competitiveness of elections and the increasing interest in applying information and communication technologies (ICT) to electoral processes have also engendered higher expectations for quality in elections administration. A number of countries have already made international commitments to principles intended to ensure quality and credible electoral processes. In general, local and international elections stakeholders now demand a higher level of accuracy, reliability and overall better organized elections than in the past. In response, the Electoral

Commission of Ghana and Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) around the world integrate internal quality tools in their electoral processes. Consequently hybrids of election quality measurements are gaining popularity among research fraternity.

A number of election quality studies least take into consideration citizens perceptions and expectations, which negate the ultimate aim of improving the quality of elections. For example, Election Observers often make their conclusions on quality based on impressions and inadequate evidence centred on the conduct and counting of ballots on election day, while observation missions call the results of an elections as 'substantially free and fair,' often disengaged from the reality of the process itself (Elklit and Reynolds, 2005). Perception is very influential phenomenon in every human activity as people usually act on their experiences. Arpita (2008) argues that perception eventually transforms into reality. (Mpabanga *et al.*, 2009) has pointed out that the acceptability of the electoral process hinges on the electorates' and candidates' perception that the process has been free and fair. In situations where the perception of the electoral process is of doubtful quality, it has led to low confidence in the process and in some instances, ignites conflict and fuel political instability. The pursuit to assess the perception of quality of the electoral process is to help provide better services to the public, improve operational performance, increase reliability and develop a culture of continuous improvement (Deco, 2010). Bartolin argues that, assessing the quality of the electoral process is essential as it

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appraises the nature of electoral processes and detects challenges and threats to the quality of these processes

Research Objectives

1. To assess voters expectations and perceptions of the quality of the electoral process in the Tamale Metropolis.
2. To analyse the gap between voters expectations and perceptions of quality of elections using the SERVQUAL model in the Tamale Metropolis.

Literature review

Electoral Process

The electoral process refers to all the activities and procedures involved in the election of representatives by the electorates (Olawale cited in Akamere 2010). Put differently, electoral process refers to all the pre and post-election activities. In addition, the term also refers to the rules that guide electoral conducts. The process explains the laws and systems that must be followed by all participants to ensure free and fair elections. Elections are managed as continuous processes rather than as isolated events on a given day (USAID 2010). Elections typically follow a well-established pattern, with three distinct periods: the pre-electoral, the electoral, and the post-electoral periods (Lithotech, 2009).

Electoral Phase

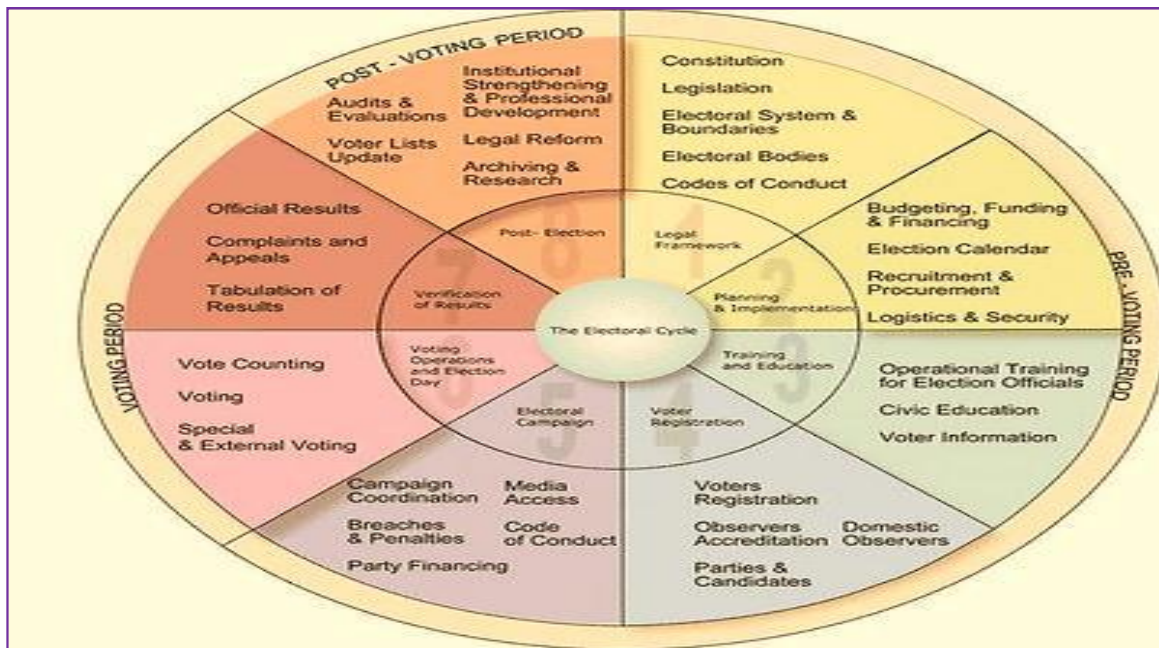
This phase includes all operations leading to the casting of votes by voters and ends with the closure of polling stations. The election period focuses on tasks such as candidate nomination, voting and results declaration.

Post-Electoral Phase

The post-electoral phase is the period between the closing of polling stations and the declaration of final election results. It includes operations such as the collation of results, declaration of provisional results, resolution of electoral disputes and declaration of final results.

Key Stakeholders of the Electoral Process

The stakeholders are those individuals, groups and organizations that have an interest or ‘stake’ in the electoral commission operations. Thus, the stakeholders include Elections Management Body, the government, political parties, electors, media, and other organizations who indirectly are involved with the elections (Godlove, 2011). Stakeholders matters during and after elections.



Source IDEA, 2009

Figure 1. Electoral cycle

Pre-Electoral Phase

The pre-electoral phase focuses on preparatory activities including planning, training and registration. These include the legal framework, training of electoral officials, sensitization of citizens, compilation and updating or revision and exhibition of the voters’ register.

Theoretical Framework

Definitions of Quality

The concept of quality has been defined in different ways in the literature. ISO (1994) defines quality as the totality of characteristics an entity bears on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs. The ISO 9000 quality management system also provides a general interpretation of quality. The technical

dictionary ISO 9000 (2005) defines quality as the “degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements”. Kumra cited in Garvin (1988) also suggested five definitions that emerge from certain point of views. They are Transcendent, product-based, user-based, manufacturing-based and value-based. Stamatis (1996) identified definitions of quality among the different authors. The common ones include fitness for use (Juran, 1988) meeting or exceeding customers’ needs and expectations (Grönroos, 1983), conformance to requirements, (Crosby, 1979) and conformance to specifications (Levitt, 1972).

The Concept of Service Quality

Extensive literature has examined the concept of service quality, its concepts, and measurements. The most widely used definitions of quality in the literature are based on meeting or exceeding the customer’s expectations and customer satisfaction. The common definition of service quality is the extent to which a service meets customers’ needs or expectations (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). Lewis and Booms (1983) define Service quality as how well a customer’s needs are met, and how well the service delivered meets the customer’s expectations. But Fisk *et al* (2008) define service quality from the service provider’s perspective as the degree to which the service’s features comply with the organization’s specifications and requirements. Abdul cited Schneider (2004) also define service quality as customers’ assessment on the overall excellence or superiority of the services provided. Juran (1999) elaborates the definition of customer led quality as “features of products which meet customers’ needs and satisfaction.” Ghobadian *et al.* (1994) suggest that most of the service quality definitions fall within the “customer led” category. However, to Kumra (2008), service quality is not only involved in the final service, but also involved in the creation and delivery process. Grönroos (1984) consider service quality as the difference between customers’ expectation and actual performance. Evaluation of service quality is recognised as having significantly contributed to various service sectors such as healthcare, marketing, finance, hospitality and local authorities (Scott and Shieff, 1993). It is widely accepted that organisations work more effectively when they deliver higher levels of service quality to customers. Therefore Electoral Commission may improve her standing in terms of public support, satisfaction, trust and confidence by taking interest in improving the quality of elections.

Expectations of Service Quality

Cadotte *et al.* (1987), described “customer expectations as a belief about service delivery”. This serves as a reference points against which performance is assessed. Miller (1977) emphasize that expectations represent what service providers ‘should’ offer as an ideal standard of performance. Davidow and Uttal (1989), proposed that customers expectations are formed by many factors which include previous experience, advertising, and customers’ psychological condition at the time of service delivery, customer background and values. Similarly, Alin (2010) also stated that customers’ expectation may be based on previous product experiences, personal

attitudes, learning from advertisements and word-of-mouth communication.

Perceived Service Quality

Many authors examine “perceived service quality” in order to understand consumers. Miller (1977), cited Parasuraman *et al.* As having asserted that perceived quality of service is the difference between customers’ expectation and their perceptions of the actual service received. Krishna (2010), describes customer perceptions as the personal assessments of actual service received or experienced and whether they are satisfied with the quality of the service. In the view of Krishna (2010), four factors that influence customers’ service perceptions according to Zeithaml are image, price, service encounters, people, process and physical evidence.

Service Quality Models

SERVQUAL Model

One of the main research instruments used over the years to analyze the concepts of quality is the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL model was developed by Parasuraman, Zeitham and Berry in 1985. The process involved the adoption of the SERVQUAL concept that service quality is the difference between consumer’s perceptions of services offered and their expectations of services about these services. This concept is also stated as “difference score” or “perceived quality” $Q = P - E$, where P and E are the ratings on the perception and expectation scale respectively.

SERVQUAL Dimensions

Service quality involves five dimensions. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), identifies ten determinants for measuring service quality which were later refined and developed into five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Reliability

This is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. According to Lewis and Booms (1983) reliability is “core” to most organizations. For example, election officials are required to perform their duties that have been promised to stakeholders and also resolve problems encountered by the electorates.

Assurance

Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence including competence, courtesy, credibility and security.

Tangibility

Tangibility refer stothe physical evidence of the service, consisting of physical facilities, appearance of personnel, tools or equipment and physical delivery of the service (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

Responsiveness

This is the tendency and willingness of service providers to help clients and satisfy their needs, immediately reply to their inquiries, and solve their problems as quickly as possible. In respect to elections, it involves the ability of election officials to handles voters promptly by ensuring quick identification of voters, production of voter ID cards and professionalism in handling and recovering from mistakes.

Empathy

Empathy refers to the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers including access, communication and understanding the customers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted essentially quantitative and qualitative approach to assess the service quality of electoral process. In doing so, a cross-section survey design was used.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

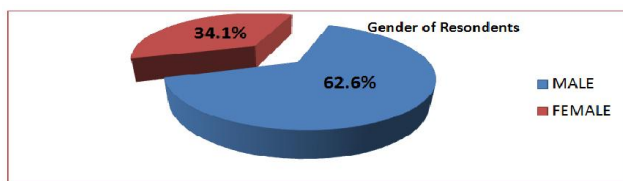
In this study, a stratified random sampling method was used to select the sample. Voters from Tamale Metropolis were stratified according to constituencies, namely Tamale South, Tamale Central and Tamale North. The sample size for this study was 384 with a 95% level of confidence at 0.05 margin of error.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of Demographic Data of Respondents

Gender of the Respondents

On Figure 2 below, female respondents were 34%. The males were 63%. The dominant gender among the respondents was therefore males. This indicates that males had higher interest in participating in elections and political issues.



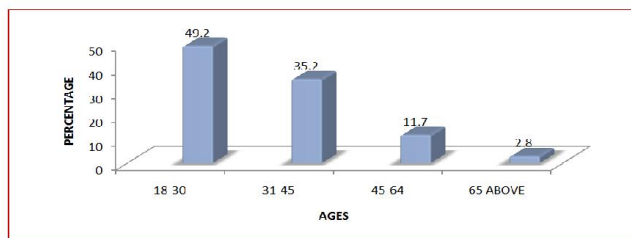
Source: Field Data, 2012

Figure 2. Genders of Respondent

Age Ranges of Respondents

Figure 3 shows the age range of the respondents. 49% of the respondents were between 18-30 years old, which constituted the bulk of respondents. 35% of the respondents were between 31-35 years old. 11.7% of the respondents were between 45-64 years old. Respondents' aged above 64 were 2.8% of the total respondents. From Figure 3 then, it can be inferred that this

study received responses from all age levels especially from the youth and this could increases the variability of the study findings, because individuals with different age level might have different service quality perception, expectation and satisfaction.



Source: Field Data, 2012

Figure 3. Age Ranges of Respondents

Analysis of voters' Expectations and Perceptions

Overall Mean Rating of Expectation Dimensions

The SERVQUAL means for expectations on each of the five dimensions was calculated by adding up all the statement means score and divided by the number of statements. According to Figure 4, the voter expectations on all service quality dimensions were very high. The *reliability* and *tangibility* recorded the highest mean scores of 4.66 and 4.58 respectively. The third highest scores were from the *assurance* and *empathy* with the same mean scores of 4.60. The *responsiveness* dimension recorded the lowest mean score of 4.46. This suggests that respondents considered the *responsiveness* dimension as relatively less important in determining quality of elections.



Source: Field Data, 2012

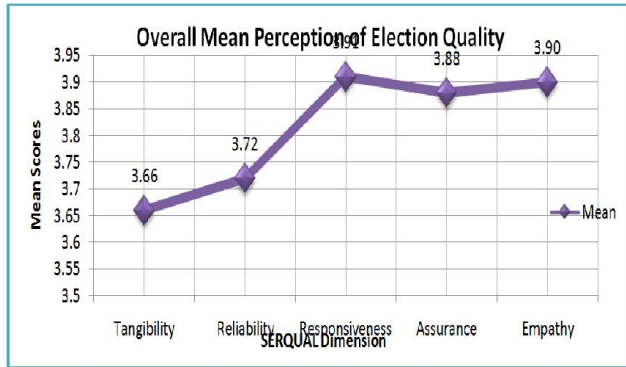
Figure 4. Mean Rating of Expectation

Analysis of voters Perception

Overall Mean Rating of Perception Dimension

Figure 5 below gives the mean scores for voter perception of elections on the SERVQUAL dimensions. On Figure 5, the voter perception on all service quality dimensions were relatively high. The *responsiveness* and *empathy* recorded the highest mean scores of 3.91 and 3.90 respectively. The third highest scores were from *assurance* with a mean score of 3.88 and *reliability* has a mean score of 3.72. The *tangibility* dimension recorded the lowest mean score of 3.66. This

suggests that voters were not satisfied with equipment and other facilities provided at the polling and registration centres.



Source: Field Data, 2012

Figure 5. Overall Mean Rating of Perception

Table 1. Summary of the voters' expectations and perceptions

Dimensions	Expectation	Perception	P-E = Gap Score	% Gap Score	Rank
Tangibility	4.58	3.65	-0.93	23%	2
Reliability	4.66	3.70	-0.96	24%	1
Responsiveness	4.54	3.89	-0.65	16%	5
Assurance	4.60	3.87	-0.73	18%	3
Empathy	4.60	3.88	-0.72	18%	4
Mean	4.60	3.80	-0.80	100%	

Source: Field Data, 2012

Analysis of SERVQUAL Gaps

Comparison of Overall Mean Expectations and Perception

Along the expectation dimensions, Reliability was rated highest (4.66) by respondents followed by Empathy (4.60) and Assurance (4.60), then Tangibility (4.58) and the least was Responsiveness (4.54). In terms of the perception, responsiveness was rated highest (3.89) followed by Empathy (3.88) and the least was Tangibles (3.65). According to the computation of gap score, all mean scores were below zero. The largest difference between perception and expectation were from the "Reliability" (-0.96). The second highest service gap was "Tangibility" (-0.93). This is followed by "Assurance" and "Empathy". The smallest gap was from the "Responsiveness" (-0.65), while the overall gap score is -0.80. The gap results have shown that respondents' expectations about the electoral process exceeded their perceptions, thus improvements are needed across all five dimensions so that Electoral Commission could offer their major stakeholders, the voters, excellent services at all times.

Conclusion

The study found that respondents had high expectations and average perceptions of the electoral process in the Tamale Metropolis. This was confirmed by the gap analysis, which showed that voters' perceptions were consistently less than their actual expectations. These negative gaps however, were not as wider as indicated by the average rating of all the

statements in the perception dimensions. The results on the expectation dimension showed that majority of respondents had above average expectation for quality elections. The *reliability and tangibility* had the highest mean scores. In general the perceptions of respondent were above average. In all the SERVQUAL dimensions, there were negative gaps. Negative gaps indicated that quality of election administration had not been fulfilled well enough to meet voters' expectations. The largest gap between perception and expectation were from the *Reliability* followed by *Tangibility*, *Assurance* and *Empathy*. The smallest gap was from the "Responsiveness" dimension.

Recommendation

It is recommended that management should be committed to quality development. District electoral officers should be trained in quality principles, so that they can impact such knowledge to their numerous temporary staff. Finally, it is strongly recommended that the electoral commission should adopt the SERVQUAL model for self-assessment. This type of survey should be undertaken after every election to be abreast with changing voters' expectations and perceptions of the electoral process over time. In spite of the negative gaps, the general observation of the electoral commission is positive; the commission however needs to further improve, as high service quality perception can be used as a means to gain the confidence and trust of stakeholders.

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