Service Seeker's Satisfaction of Sainamaina Municipality

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Abstract

The objectives of the research are to examine the quality of municipal services provided by local government in sainamaina; and to identify the most important service quality dimensions that determine citizen satisfaction. The questionnaires were distributed to 450 respondents in all the 11 wards, of municipality of Rupandehi district in Lumbini Province of western Nepal. Deliberative inclusion and exclusion is made to avoid political bias responses. Descriptive statistics, multiple regression, Pearson correlation is used to determine the association between variables, cronbac alfa and Q-plot conducted to analyze the reliability and normalcy of data. The five dimensions of modified SERVQUAL and SERVPERF is used to assess service quality that represent a valid instrument to measure municipal service quality in sainamaina setting; and therefore, five service quality dimensions, namely Reliability, tangibility, empathy, assurance and responsiveness significantly predicted citizen satisfaction. Among the five, Responsiveness and empathy found to be the most impacting factor in the overall service satisfaction of sainamaina. Finally, service quality assessments can be used as a strategic tool for improving municipal services.

Keywords: *Service, quality, satisfaction, local government.*

1 Introduction

The beauty of decentralization is to provide timely and quality service to its citizens by the local government. While the central government attains the goals of economic development, the local governments manage the growing urban areas and provide the basics for their residents as stated in the charter which assured the quality service. Regardless to many constraints in getting the financial grants from the central level, local governments if fail to manage its service delivery that may raise the questions of good

governance. The failure to serve the citizens well may leads to the protests and break the chain of democracy and frequent change of government which is assume to be the huge loss to the nation.

On September 20, 2015, the people of Nepal embarked another chapter in their governance history. After years of prolonged negotiation, a political compromise was reached between the major political parties and the Constituent Assembly of Nepal approved the country's new constitution. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 A.D established a federal government structure with the vision of establishing strong local governments (LGs), which are vested with greater authority. In 2017, after a gap of 15 years, the Nepali people have finally elected local representatives with high expectations and hopes for the future. During the elections, campaign promises included the popular slogan 'Singha darbar ko adhikar gaun-thaunma' (power enjoyed by the central government now decentralized to Local Government). However, many questions arise about how the new governance structure will be shaped and whether the local governments be effective in delivering the services as per the expectation of the citizens.

2. Literature Review

Some of past works in relation with the present study are reviewed as foundation which are discussed and summarized.

2.1 Service quality

The earliest attempts to grap the service quality concept came from the Nordic school which viewed the service from two basic dimensions i.e. technical quality (what customer receives) and functional quality (how customer receives). The technical quality is objective and therefore measurable. However functional qualities which are the expressive nature of service delivery are complex and difficult to evaluate.

Service quality is a concept that has attracted considerable interest and debate in the marketing literature because of the difficulties in both defining it and measuring it with no overall consensus emerging on either (Wisniewski, 2001). The commonly used defines service quality as the ability of the organization to meet or exceed customer expectations. It is the result of the comparison that customers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the way the service has been rendered (Zeithaml et al. 1990). If expectations are greater than performance, then

perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). Moreover, quality is a perception of service receivers and a host of opinions and reference form a service quality and not a single reference or opinions. Now it has been the accepted fact that Service quality greatly impact the satisfaction of the service receivers and many organizations make quality as a guiding principle to meet competition and prove the worth of organization. Service quality research has really achieved a truly global scope and significance as a result it has drawn the attraction of many disciplines and scholars to work and explore in it.

2.2 SERVQUAL and SERVPERF MODEL

SERVQUAL is the model that is used for measuring service quality and customer satisfaction. American marketing professor and author Valarie Zeithaml, Leonard Berry, and A. Parasuraman suggested this SERVQUAL model in the year 1988 to analyze dimensions of service as well as perceptions of service quality. The idea was that the service is good if perceptions meet or exceed expectations and problematic if perceptions fall below expectations. The SERVQUAL model was initially designed for use for service firms and retailers. SERVQUAL now takes a broader perspective of service; far beyond simple customer service. SERVQUAL has become a widely adopted technology for measuring service quality even in context of local government. Despite its wide application, it has been criticized by different researchers. A number of theoretical and operational concerns have been raised concerning SERVQUAL. F. Buttle (critique, 1994) pointed out concern for SERVQUAL. Taylor in 1994 claimed that Parasuraman's study of relations between expected and experienced quality is not proper approach to quality assessment. over the time, a few variants of the scale have also been proposed. The service performance 'SERVPERF' is one such model that has been put forward by Cronin and Taylor in   in the early nineties which can be taken as modified or condensed version of original SERVQUAL. Cronin and Taylor (1992) concluded that service quality measurement can be based on perception only and gap analysis result between expectation and perception is not necessary. Similarly, the same perspective can be used for the measurement of citizens' satisfaction perception.

2.5 Practices in Municipalities and Reports

As evidence, Jinka Town Municipal's annual report of 2015 and 2016, majority of its customers/inhabitants reflected their complaints directly and indirectly since the office did not meet service needs of its customers and requirements (*Ashenafi Gaemi 2015).* If local institutions are unable to satisfy the needs of citizens, they may not express their support with local governments. At the same time, they may also be increasingly dissatisfied with the way local authorities in their service delivery works in their boundary (Lopez. 2011). The report recently published by International Transparency Nepal (CPI 2021) also accounted local governments as problem area as perceived by the citizens. There are theories to explain how citizens respond to poor service (Dowding. 2000) as how residents in town are dissatisfied with service delivery embark on protests as pointed by south African research (Artinskon, D. 2007)

The need to measure the public services from local range perspective would help more to understand the perception of citizen satisfaction from the close range.

How satisfied are the citizens? *By Daniel Montalvo (2009),* The Americas Barometer Insight Series attempts to answer questions by querying the public. The Americas Barometer survey carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in 23 nations in the Western hemisphere sample of 33,809 respondents were asked the question: 1. would you say that the services the municipality is providing are: (1) Very good; (2) Good (3); Neither good nor poor (fair); (4) Poor; or (5) Very poor?

Similar attempt about making such queries in the context of Nepalese municipalities and understand the reality. Determining the level of citizens' perceptions of municipal services quality, an instrument that empirically examines attitudes towards quality as well as satisfaction with municipal services based on the widely used SERVPERF scale (Donnelly M. 1999), which serves to determine level of perceived quality of services. The citizen's charter, as one of the quality assurance strategies in the public sector put forward by New Public Management theorists, has been introduced in Nepal with the view of improving the quality of governmental service delivery, increase the level of citizens" satisfaction and enhancing efficiency of bureaucratic apparatus at the local level (Acharya.S. 2010) How far it was effective in delivering the service and making the citizen satisfaction in the context of Sainamaina is still the area to be explored yet. Carefully crafted surveys can yield an abundance of useful information to help make

more informed decisions and better policy formulation, and to offer services in more responsive to citizen preferences and needs. (Pokharel, T. et.al 2017).

Nepal is now divided into seven provinces, and further sub-divided into 293 urban municipalities and 460 rural municipalities. The newly established municipalities are overall larger in size, vested with greater authority, and shoulder the responsibility to uphold a promise to the people of Nepal. The local level elections were undertaken in three phases from May to September 2017, and provincial elections were held in November and December 2017(Diagnostic Study, 2017)

3. Methodology

3.1 Instrument for survey.

The data were collected by using a structured questionnaire, which consists of three parts. Part 1 was designed to gather information about the respondent's demographic background such as name, gender, age, educational level, and frequency of visit, Part 2 consists of guidelines as instructions to the respondents. Part 3 consists of 25 specific statements questions related to measure respondents' perception towards the service quality of municipal council. The SERVQUAL scale that was designed by Parasuraman et al. (Shiu, E. 1999) and SERVPERF forwarded by Cronin and Taylor (J. Joseph Cronin, 1994) were used entirety in this study. The respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement using 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores on this scale indicate higher levels of service quality. The last 3 questions intended to gather information about respondents' overall satisfaction with services provided by the municipal council. The questionnaire was originally prepared in English and the version was translated into Nepali to ease the respondents understanding. Accuracy of this translation was verified during the questionnaire pretesting stage. A pilot study involving 10 respondents from ward no 3 and 4 was conducted to test the instrument. The purpose is to determine the appropriateness and relevance of the items in the survey as well as the level of difficulty of the language for the respondents to answer the questions. Based on the feedback from the respondents on the instrument, several modifications were made to the questions so that they were more understandable. Observation and interview was also the part undertaken to collect the information as input for the research.

3.2 Data collection

The respondents were approached with the purpose of the study being explained to them. The residents of sainamaina were the sample of the study. The number of households in the municipality is 12,392 with population of 78,477 (http://citypopulation) The survey was administered in the month of September and October 2021 AD. A sample of 450 respondents with the help of field assistants (students) were asked to voluntarily participate in this survey. Only respondent who are literate were handed the questionnaire and filled on the spot. Key persons were also interviewed by means of a fact structured open ended questionnaire. Both convenience and random sampling was applied. The questionnaire is administered in Nepali language for better understanding. This seem simple but keeping in mind as Millar point out (Folz 2010), "one of the most common mistakes made in citizen surveys is asking the wrong people the right questions". Deliberate inclusion and exclusion was made to avoid biasness in response due to immature political etiquette in the country. It was ensured that the respondents are genuine and frequently visited sainamaina municipal office. 216 respondents are accepted and rest were rejected on ground of validity and reliability. Therefore, the response Rate is 60% and out of which only 54% were accepted. Lack of financial resources posed a big challenge as field survey is a costly work.

3.3 Analytic procedure

450 set questionnaires were distributed and 270 filled questionnaires were collected out of which 216 were accepted and rest were rejected during the screening process. Data from 216 valid questionnaires were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe respondents' demographic characteristics and to evaluate service quality perceptions of municipal services. Pearson correlation, Anova and regression analysis, cronbac reliability test and Q- plot were performed to identify correlation, and ensure the internal consistency and normalcy of data. Both primary and secondary data are the inputs of the present work, the SERVPERF model is used to measures perception of service quality and uses the same five dimensions ie reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy and tangibles as independents variables and client satisfaction as the dependent variable. The typical 5 level likert scale (Rensis, 1932) is used to measure the degree of satisfaction (5 as highest) and dissatisfaction (1 as the lowest). The collected data are entered and analyzed

using statistical tools and SPSS 25 is used extensively to generate output. The test of normalcy is checked and found within acceptable level and reliability of data is ensured using cronbac alfa. (Cronbach, 1951.)

3.4 Anova

We used a one-way ANOVA for demographic variables of participants, including gender, age and educational attainment, and the results of our ANOVA indicated no significant difference in the sample Mean regarding Age, sex, educational level and satisfaction of respondents.

4. Findings

Demographic Profile.

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the respondents' demographic profile. The sample consisted of 216 respondents of males (56%) and females (44%), with the largest age group between 31 to 59 years old (69.9%). Regarding the level of education, most of the respondents were 12 level standards of education (31%), whereas 29.7% had completed diploma level and above education, and 16.2 % had school level(literate). The majority of respondents 68.9 % were the frequent visitors who received service from the office of the municipality. 28% were reported to have taken services "some times'' whereas 2.3% had experienced the service for the first time.

Table:1

Demographic Profile of the Sample

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	121	56%
	Female	95	44%
Age	17 to 30yrs	50	23.1%
	31 to 59 yrs	151	69.9%
	60 and above	15	6.9%
Education	School education	35	16.2%
	Up to 10	50	23.1%
	Up to 12	67	31%
	Diploma and above	64	29.7%
Frequency of visit.	One time	05	2.3 %
	Sometimes	45	28.%
	Frequently	111	68.9%
WARD NO	Ward1	27	12.5 %
	Ward2	31	14.4 %
	Ward3	22	10.2 %
	Ward4	26	12 %
	Ward5	22	10.2 %
	Ward6	14	06.5 %
	Ward7	13	06 %
	Ward8	14	06.5 %
	Ward9	16	07.4 %
	Ward10	11	05.1 %
	Ward11	20	09.3 %

5 Dimensionality of Service Quality

5.1 Service reliability

As to examine the reliability of service and that sainamaina office perform its intended function adequately, we take into consideration the promised service, problem solving, timely service, and error free works. To assess the municipal ability to perform service in a reliable way, 5 questions were included in the questionnaire and represented as REL1, REL2, REL3, REL4, REL5.

In the service dimension of reliability, the mean score is found 3.03 with S.D 0.81 and r = 0.453. Most of the citizens felt that municipal is not providing services as promised. Service seekers state that they had to go time and again to get the work done. Citizens claimed that the problems are not addressed properly by the municipal office. only a small portion (26.1%) of our respondents reported that they are served well in time by the municipal. However, 51% of respondents agreed that office maintain good records and services are error free.

5.2 Responsiveness

Responsiveness: The willingness of municipality to help service seekers, such as service information (RES6), quick response to service (RES 7), willing to help (RES8) and complaint handling (RES9) to public are referred to as Responsiveness. The responsiveness variables are denoted as RES 6, RES7, RES8 and RES9 and Altogether 4 questions were included in the questionnaire. The Municipal employees are found responsive towards the provision of service information. The mean score is 3.05 with S.D of 0.74 and correlation coefficient (r) =0.615. The relative importance of this dimension as indicated by Standardized Beta Coefficients (β=.44; p<.001) and is evident that it has the strongest impact on satisfaction.

5.3 Assurance dimension

The assessment of employees' behavior towards clients, confidence, courteous and knowledge of employees of sainamaina municipality and their ability to inspire trust and instill confidence in public is termed as assurance. To measure the citizens' perception, 4 questions were included in the questionnaire and represented as ASS10, ASS11, ASS12, and ASS13. Significant portion in our study sample ie 52.2% of the respondents perceived that the employees at the municipal office are courteous while providing service to the clients. Citizens perceived that employees in the municipal are able to convey trust and instill confidence. It was found that employees had ability to inspire and they are aware of the citizen's problems. The mean score of Assurance dimension is found 3.26 with S.D 0.37 and Correlation coefficient r = 0.37. This factor is found having no impact in the service seeker satisfaction.

5.4 Empathy

To what extent the municipal care the service receivers and provide individualized attention is referred to as empathy. in order to assess the empathy as one of the service quality dimension of service seekers satisfaction, 4 questions were intended in questionnaire and which represented indiscriminate service (EMP14), client best interest (EMP15), understand clients need (EMP16), and conveniently available staffs (EMP17). The analysis of data found service receivers perceived that they are not treated fairly and equally and feel discriminated in the service provision of the municipality. Significant number of people ie 55.3% do not agree that individual attention and care provided by service provider to the clients. Citizens feel that municipal does not understand the needs of the service receivers. The mean score of this dimension is 2.94 which is the lowest among the five variables. Empathy is found to have high association with client satisfaction ie r= 0. 52.

5.5 Tangibles:

To check the citizens perception towards the appearance of physical facilities and equipment (TAN 18), office building (TAN 19) personnel (TAN 19) and placement of equipment and materials (TAN 21), 4 questions were included in the questionnaire and represented as TAN18, TAN19, TAN20, TAN21.

The mean score of tangible variable is calculated as 3.50 and SD 0.74 with correlation coefficient (r) = .423. Remarkable numbers of the service seekers i.e 59.7% (TAN18) responded that municipal office is attractive. The professional appearance of the employees (TAN19), most of the   respondents ie 74.1 %   indicated   that employees look professional and attractive and in contrast a small portion of respondents i.e 2.8 % remarked that staffs are not professional. In study 43% (TAN21) observed that materials and things are in the right place.

5.6 Service seekers satisfaction

To determine the overall client satisfaction, we had collected the responses as represented by SSS 22, SSS 23 and SSS24. The overall client satisfaction Mean score is calculated as 3.41 with S.D 0.63 and significantly correlated with all the service quality dimensions. When asked as what opinion they hold about   and how they ranked

sainamaina overall, about 51.4 % responded "Good'' and 11.5% indicated as "Very Good". Most of the service seekers are found satisfied with the municipal office. About 19.4% are found dissatisfied and 1.9% as very dissatisfied with the municipal.

6. Correlations of the Perceived Quality Dimensions and Satisfaction

A Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to determine the amount of association between the studied variables. It was observed that all Service quality variables correlated in a positive and significant manner with satisfaction significantly ($p < .001$). The analysis indicated a high correlation between satisfaction and responsiveness ($r = .615$), followed by empathy ($r = .522$), reliability ($r = .453$), tangibility ($r = .423$) and assurance ($r = .347$).

7 Service Quality Dimension and its Impact

As the sample size used for the study is not large, it is considered to use regression analysis to test the impacting service factors on client satisfaction. The adjusted R square is .393 which depicts that independent variable define dependent variable by 39.3%. There is no case of Multicollinearity as VIF is less than 10. The table 4 below shows the stepwise regression

Table 4: Stepwise regression.

Model	Predictor	B coefficient	Beta(β)	t-value	p-value	F-ratio	Adjusted R2
1)	(constant)	2.347		15.724	.000	55.26	.202
	Reliability	.353	.453	7.434	.000		
2)	(constant)	1.627		10.289	.000	68.81	.384
	Reliability,	.115	.147	2.249	.026		
	Responsiveness	.453	.530	8.104	.000		
3)	(constant)	1.589		8.306	.000	45.73	.387
	Reliability,	.110	.141	2.076	.039		
	Responsiveness,	.446	.522	7.575	.000		
	Assurance	.23	.230	.358	.721		
4)	(constant)	1.643		8.608	.000	36.28	.396
	Reliability,	.082	.105	1.515	.000		
	Responsiveness,	.381	.446	5.879	.000		
	Assurance,	.019	.19	.288	.001		
	Empathy	.127	.177	2.283	.003		

5)	(constant)	1.643			8.104	.000	28.890	.393
	Reliability,	.082	.105		1.435	.007		
	Responsiveness,	.381	.446		5.750	.000		
	Assurance,	-.019	-.19		.285	.776		
	Empathy,	.127	.177		2.226	.002		
	Tangibility	0	.000		.001	1.000		

Note: t-value> 1.64, p < 0.1; t-value > 1.96,

Statistics on variables that entered the regression equation and that, collectively explained the portions of the variance in the dependent variable are summarized in Table above. The overall F-test for the final regression model was significant (F =28.89, p < .001), with five service quality dimensions entered the resulting equation: Reliability (β = .105, p < .001), Responsiveness (β = .446, p < .001), Empathy (β= .177) and assurance (β= -.019, p<.001).The explanatory power of this model, as reported by the adjusted R^2 value was .393 , suggesting that 39.3 percent of the variability in the subjects' overall satisfaction was predicted by the service quality dimensions. This effect size can be considered as significant. The relative importance of the service quality dimensions was indicated by their Standardized Beta Coefficients.

The coefficients value shows that Responsiveness   with 38.1% and Empathy with 12.7% and reliability with 8.2% are the better predictors of citizens satisfaction. Responsiveness with p-value 0.000 less than 0.005 suggests that sainamaina municipal inform about the services, willing to help and respond to the citizens enquiries. Responsiveness and Empathy are significantly correlated to service seeker satisfaction. However, Reliability, Assurance and tangibility are the least predicting variable for satisfaction. It has p-value more than 0.005 suggest, don't have significant relationship with satisfaction, whereas Assurance with coefficient value of -0.19 is a negative predictor of satisfaction.

 Therefore, based on above result, the following equation can be formulated:

Y = b0 + b1 X1 + b2 X2 + ……. + bn Xn

S= 1.643 + 0.381(RES) + 0.127(EMP)

Where, S= Satisfaction, RES= Responsiveness, EMP= Empathy

To test for the possible presence of multicollinearity problem, a correlation matrix was run among the five independent variables. The intercorrelations among the five independent variables found ranging from 0.317 to 0.665. Thus, it was concluded that there were no high intercorrelations existed among these variables. However, the absence of high correlation does not imply lack of collinearity because the correlation matrix may not reveal collinear relationships involving more than two variables. Therefore, the tolerance values of the independent variables were assessed further while the regression analysis was run using the conventional tolerance value of 0.1 as the cut-off point for high multicollinearity. The analysis showed that all independent variables in the regression equation had high tolerance values ranging from 0.469 to 0.667.

We used a one-way ANOVA for demographic variables of participants, including gender, age and educational attainment, and the results of our ANOVA indicated no significant difference in the sample mean regarding age, gender, educational level and satisfaction.

Conclusions

1. In the service dimension of reliability, most of the citizens felt that municipal is not providing services as promised. Service seekers state that they had to go time and again to get the work done. Citizens claimed that the problems are not addressed properly by the municipal office

2. The Municipal employees are found responsive towards the provision of service information (mean score 3.05 with standard deviation .67 and correlation .542). Major portion of the respondents accepted that the office provides prior information to the public about the services.

3. Assurance dimension: Significant portion of our study sample perceived that the employees at the municipal office are courteous while providing service to the clients. Citizens perceived that employees in the municipal are able to convey trust, inspire and instill confidence.

4. Most of the service receivers perceived that they are not treated fairly and equally and feel discriminated in the service provision of the municipality. Significant number of people ie 55.3% do not agree that individual attention and care provided

by service provider to the clients. Citizen feel that municipal does not understand the needs of the service receivers.

5. The provision made by the sainamaina municipality in terms of tangibility and infrastructure such as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and technologies are found well equipped. The office of sainamaina looks attractive and well furnished.

6. The overall client satisfaction Mean score is calculated as 3.41 with S.D 0.63 and significantly correlated with all the service quality dimensions about 51.4 % responded "Good'' and 11.5% indicated as "Very Good". Most of the service seekers are found satisfied with the services provided by sainamaina municipal office.

7. The overall F-test for the final regression model was significant (F =28.89, p < .001), with five service quality dimensions entered the resulting equation: Reliability (β = .105, p < .001), Responsiveness (β = .441, p < .001), Empathy (β= .127) and assurance (β=.019, p<.001).The explanatory power of this model, as reported by the adjusted(R2) value was .393 , suggesting that 39.3 percent of the variability in the subjects' overall satisfaction was predicted by the service quality dimensions. The relative importance of the service quality dimensions was indicated by their Standardized Beta Coefficients. The strongest impact on satisfaction was by two service dimension i.e Responsiveness (β=.44; p<.001) and then Empathy (β = .177; p<.001)

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DOI:10.2307/1251430