

Research Article

Exploring Guest Expectations of Guest Houses Service Quality in the Sunyani Municipality

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Abstract

This study rigorously explores the intricate expectations guests hold regarding the quality of services provided by guesthouses within the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana. Guesthouses play a vital role in Ghana's tourism sector, offering an affordable alternative to larger hotels. However, they frequently encounter significant challenges, including inconsistent service quality, inadequate infrastructure, and deficiencies in managerial capacity and staff training. Despite the recognized importance of service quality in hospitality, there remains a notable research gap concerning guesthouses, particularly in emerging urban centers like Sunyani. This research aimed to address this gap by specifically examining customers' perceptions of service quality, identifying the multifaceted factors that influence their expectations, and proposing strategic staff recruitment approaches to enhance overall service delivery. Employing a qualitative case study design, this investigation sought an in-depth understanding of guest experiences. The target population comprised patrons of registered guesthouses in Sunyani. From an accessible population of 95 guests, a sample of 35 participants was carefully selected using a simple random sampling method, a size considered appropriate for qualitative inquiry. Data were meticulously collected through semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent. The collected data were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and grouping to identify prevalent themes reflecting participants' views and experiences. The findings reveal that guests predominantly prioritize fundamental service quality indicators such as cleanliness, hygiene, and the comfort and maintenance of their rooms. Beyond tangible aspects, staff behavior, encompassing attentiveness, friendliness, and responsiveness, emerged as a critical determinant of service quality perceptions. Guest expectations were significantly shaped by their prior experiences, recommendations from others, marketing efforts, perceived standards, economic considerations like affordability, and diverse cultural backgrounds. The study synthesizes that while hotels may attract with extensive amenities, guesthouses thrive by delivering personalized, attentive service at competitive prices. The conclusions highlight the profound influence of cleanliness, comfort, and staff responsiveness on guest satisfaction. Effective staff training and robust feedback mechanisms are crucial for sustained service improvement. Consequently, the study recommends periodic inspections by the Ghana Tourism Authority in collaboration with the Sunyani Municipal Assembly, continuous staff training in communication and customer service, the implementation of structured feedback systems, and strategic resource allocation to maintain facilities and hygiene standards. This research offers practical insights for guesthouse operators and policymakers to enhance service quality and ensure customer satisfaction within the Sunyani Municipality.

Keywords

Guest Expectations, Guesthouses, Service Quality, Sunyani Municipality

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1. Introduction

Service quality has long been recognized as a key driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality industry. Improvements in service delivery often lead to greater customer retention, positive word-of-mouth referrals, and higher profitability [1]. Guesthouses, as small-scale accommodation facilities, are significant contributors to Ghana's tourism and hospitality sector. Typically, a guesthouse is a private residence converted or purposely built to accommodate visitors, usually operating with fewer than eleven rooms and managed by individuals or families [2].

Managing service delivery in guesthouses, however, presents challenges due to the intangible and variable nature of services. Outcomes often depend on the interactions between staff, customers, and the service environment [3]. Research has shown that these interactions strongly shape customer experiences in sectors such as hospitality, healthcare, and banking [4, 5]. Parasuraman et al. argue that both the outcome of the service and the manner in which it is delivered influence consumer satisfaction [6]. Customers' expectations are therefore shaped not only by the tangible facilities but also by staff attitudes, communication, and responsiveness [7].

Given the competitive nature of the hospitality industry, service quality has become a crucial differentiating factor for businesses [8-10]. Organizations that consistently deliver high-quality services often enjoy stronger brand positioning, increased sales, and improved market share [11]. For guesthouses in particular, delivering consistent service quality is essential to meeting the expectations of guests who seek value for money, personalized service, and comfort [12, 13].

Several studies have highlighted gaps in service quality across the guesthouse sector. Briggs et al. found that while guests do not always demand luxurious experiences, they expect accuracy, responsiveness, and a personal touch [14]. Staff behavior and attitudes, especially at the frontline, significantly affect guests' perceptions of service quality [15]. Where staff show indifference or lack adequate training, customers are more likely to report dissatisfaction.

Understanding customer expectations is therefore critical for guesthouse managers. Expectations are often shaped by prior travel experiences, recommendations, and cultural backgrounds [16]. Meeting or exceeding these expectations can determine whether guests return or choose alternative accommodation.

While the broader hospitality sector, particularly hotels, has been extensively studied concerning service quality and guest satisfaction, research specifically focusing on guesthouses in developing economies, and more precisely within Ghana's Sunyani Municipality, remains notably limited [9]. Guesthouses represent a distinct and vital segment of the tourism industry, offering unique services and catering to different guest demographics compared to larger hotels, often serving as a more affordable and locally integrated option [11].

However, they frequently grapple with challenges such as inconsistent service delivery, infrastructural limitations, and gaps in managerial capacity and staff training [16]. This disparity in research attention creates a significant gap in understanding the specific expectations of guesthouse patrons and the factors influencing their service quality perceptions within this context, thereby underscoring the critical need for studies dedicated to this often-overlooked yet economically significant sub-sector.

This study was conducted to explore guest expectations of service quality in guesthouses within the Sunyani Municipality. It focuses on identifying customer perceptions, the factors influencing their expectations, and strategies to enhance staff recruitment and service delivery. The findings are intended to provide practical insights for guesthouse operators and policy stakeholders in improving the quality of services within the municipality.

2. Problem Statement

Guesthouses in Ghana are a vital component of the hospitality sector, providing an affordable and accessible alternative to hotels for both domestic and international travelers [17, 18]. However, this segment faces critical practical challenges that hinder its potential and impact guest satisfaction. Specifically, many guesthouses operate with inadequate service quality, poor infrastructure, weak managerial capacity, and insufficiently trained staff [19]. These deficiencies directly compromise their ability to consistently meet guest expectations and deliver high-quality service, which is crucial for repeat patronage and positive reputation in a competitive market [10]. While the importance of service quality in hospitality is well-established, there is a notable research void concerning guesthouses in Ghana, with previous studies predominantly focusing on larger hotel establishments [20]. This lack of understanding regarding guest perceptions and service quality evaluation in guesthouses, especially in rapidly developing urban centers like Sunyani, highlights a pressing need for focused research to inform effective strategies for improvement and competitiveness [18].

3. Literature Review

3.1. Defining Service

The concept of service has been interpreted in multiple ways. Sasser et al. describe it as an intangible offering that cannot be stored but is consumed during its provision [21]. Cateora et al. [22] characterize it as a performance or activity with intrinsic value, while [23] define service as any intangible act or benefit one party offers another without transferring ownership. Grön-

roos et al. adds that service comprises activities and processes that take place during interactions between customers, employees, and organizational systems, intended to solve customer problems [24]. This study adopts [25] definition of service as a set of intangible activities occurring during interactions between customers and providers, supported by physical resources, with the purpose of addressing customer needs.

3.2. Service Quality

Service quality is often distinguished from product quality due to its unique attributes, including intangibility, variability, inseparability, and perishability [26, 27]. Numerous models have been developed to measure service quality, with the SERVQUAL model by [6] being among the most widely applied. This model identifies five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In hospitality, these dimensions are especially relevant since guests evaluate both the physical environment and interpersonal service delivery [23, 26] further distinguishes between technical quality (what the customer receives) and functional quality (how it is delivered). [23] also adds societal quality, reflecting ethical and socially responsible practices.

3.3. Managerial Perception of Service Quality

Managerial perspectives play a critical role in shaping service quality. [28] argue that organizational culture influences managerial priorities, while [29] suggests that managers often emphasize tangible aspects such as infrastructure, whereas guests focus more on staff responsiveness and attitude. Studies by [30] confirm that while guests' expectations are shaped by cultural and personal factors, managers' assessments may be influenced by internal biases. Staff training and institutional support are therefore essential in aligning managerial and customer perspectives.

3.4. Customer Satisfaction and Behavioural Intention

Customer satisfaction has long been recognized as central to organizational success in hospitality [31]. Satisfaction emerges when service delivery meets or exceeds expectations, whereas dissatisfaction arises when expectations fall short [32]. Positive experiences encourage repeat patronage and favorable word-of-mouth referrals. Conversely, poor service delivery undermines loyalty and can damage reputation [8]. For guesthouses, where competition is strong, ensuring customer satisfaction is essential for long-term viability.

4. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine guest expectations of service quality in guesthouses within the Sunyani Municipality. This design was chosen for

its appropriateness in enabling an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and the complex dynamics influencing service quality perceptions [33]. The study population comprised guests staying in registered guesthouses in Sunyani. Records from the Ghana Tourism Authority indicated 67 registered guesthouses, from which an accessible population of 95 guests, who had stayed for at least 72 hours during the research period, was identified.

From the accessible population, 35 participants were selected using a simple random sampling method [34]. While qualitative research often favors purposive sampling to select information-rich cases, simple random sampling was deliberately employed in this context to *minimize potential researcher bias in participant selection and ensure a broad, representative spectrum of experiences from the defined accessible population of guesthouse patrons* [35]. The primary objective was to explore diverse guest expectations and perceptions without preconceived notions about which guests might offer the 'most' valuable insights. By giving every eligible guest an equal chance of participation, this method enhanced the trustworthiness and potential transferability of the findings, reflecting the varied perspectives of guesthouse customers in the Sunyani Municipality.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol organized around the study objectives: perceptions of service quality, expectations, influencing factors, and staff recruitment strategies [36]. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, was audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

The verbatim transcripts were subjected to rigorous *thematic analysis* to interpret the data, identify patterns, and construct meaningful themes that reflected participants' views and experiences [32]. This analytical process followed the widely recognized six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke to ensure methodological rigor:

- 1) *Familiarization with the data*: The primary researcher thoroughly read and re-read all transcribed interviews, listened to audio recordings, and made initial notes to become deeply immersed and familiar with the dataset.
- 2) *Generating initial codes*: Meaningful segments of the text were systematically identified and coded across the entire dataset. These codes represented the most basic descriptive units relevant to the research questions.
- 3) *Searching for themes*: The generated codes were then collated and grouped into potential overarching themes. This phase involved actively searching for patterns and connections among the codes.
- 4) *Reviewing themes*: The identified themes were critically reviewed and refined. This involved checking if the themes accurately represented the data extracts and if the themes themselves were coherent and distinct. Themes were merged, split, or discarded as necessary to ensure relevance and internal consistency.
- 5) *Defining and naming themes*: Each final theme was

precisely defined, identifying its essence and scope, and assigned a clear, concise name. Sub-themes were also delineated to provide finer detail and nuance within broader themes.

- 6) *Producing the report*: The final step involved constructing a compelling narrative report, integrating the defined themes with illustrative quotes and examples from the data to demonstrate how they addressed the research objectives.

The study's sample size of 35 participants was deemed sufficient for this qualitative inquiry [36]. In qualitative research, the adequacy of a sample is primarily determined by the depth and richness of the data collected and the achievement of thematic saturation, rather than statistical generalizability. The iterative process of data collection and analysis allowed for continuous assessment of emerging themes. New interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached, which occurred when no new information, categories, or themes emerged from subsequent data, and existing themes were fully developed and understood [31]. This point was observed after a thorough analysis of the interviews, indicating that additional interviews would likely yield redundant information rather than novel insights. The sample size of 35, combined with the detailed nature of semi-structured interviews, proved sufficient to thoroughly explore the multifaceted aspects of service quality and guest expectations within the Sunyani Municipality.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Guests' Perceptions of Service Quality

Participants emphasized cleanliness, hygiene, and room comfort as core aspects of service quality. Staff behavior, including attentiveness and friendliness, was also central to their evaluation. Many guests pointed out that regular training, performance monitoring, and feedback systems were critical for improving service standards. Conversely, limited resources and staff shortages were reported as persistent challenges.

5.2. Factors Influencing Guest Expectations

Guest expectations were influenced by previous experiences, recommendations, marketing, and perceived standards. Economic factors such as affordability and value for money were especially significant, while cultural backgrounds shaped how guests assessed interpersonal interactions. These findings reinforce earlier work by [6], who argue that expectations are shaped by both experiential and contextual elements.

5.3. Synthesis of Findings

The study highlights that guesthouse customers in Sunyani primarily value basic service quality indicators cleanliness, responsiveness, and professionalism. While hotels may attract

customers with extensive amenities, guesthouses remain competitive when they deliver personalized and attentive service at reasonable prices. Effective staff training and structured feedback mechanisms are essential for sustaining service improvements.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that guests' perceptions of service quality in Sunyani guesthouses are strongly influenced by cleanliness, comfort, staff responsiveness, and feedback mechanisms. Expectations are shaped by prior experiences, referrals, price sensitivity, and cultural context. Guesthouses can remain competitive by focusing on basic quality standards, personalized service, and professional staff behavior.

7. Recommendations

- 1) The Ghana Tourism Authority, together with the Sunyani Municipal Assembly, should conduct periodic inspections to enforce service quality standards.
- 2) Guesthouse operators should invest in regular staff training on communication, customer service, and hospitality management.
- 3) Structured feedback systems, such as surveys and complaint tracking, should be implemented to monitor customer satisfaction.
- 4) Resources should be allocated to maintain facilities, ensure hygienic conditions, and provide basic amenities.
- 5) Guesthouse operators should strengthen marketing strategies to highlight their unique strengths, such as personalized service and affordability.

Author Contributions

Evelyn Tokuu: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft

Ellen Olu Fagbemi: Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Evelyn Tokuu is a Roman Catholic Sister with a strong academic background in catering and hospitality. She obtained her first degree in Catering and Hospitality in Education from the University of Education, Winneba (Kumasi campus) in 2021. Currently, she is pursuing an M-Phil in catering and hospitality at the Department of Hospitality and Tourism, Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED). She is actively engaged in her research as part of her postgraduate studies.

Research Field

Evelyn Tokuu: Service quality, Customer expectations and satisfaction, Hospitality operations and Tourism research

Ellen Olu Fagbemi: Vocational and hospitality education, Food Safety and consumer behaviour, Tourism and sustainability, Hospitality operations management