



**EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY DELIVERY
IN THE HOUSEKEEPING DEPARTMENTS OF GRADED
HOTELS IN BLOEMFONTEIN**

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BLOEMFONTEIN

October 2022

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENT WORK

DECLARATION WITH REGARD TO INDEPENDENT WORK

I, Rosemary Palesa Mosikatsana, identity number _____, student number _____, do hereby declare that this research project submitted to the Central University of Technology, Free State, for the degree Master of Management Sciences in Tourism and Hospitality Management, is my own independent work and complies with the Code of Academic Integrity, as well as with other relevant policies, procedures, rules and regulations of the Central University of Technology, Free State; and has not been submitted before to any institution by myself or any other person in fulfilment (or partial fulfilment) of the requirements for the attainment of any qualification.



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SUMMARY

Service quality is vital for the success of a business within the hospitality industry. It is deemed crucial, as it contributes towards gaining loyalty of customers and establishes the reputation of a business, as well as whether a company can survive or not. The constant change in guest needs and the complex structure of the hospitality sector, are significant challenges in quality assurance within this industry. Additionally, developing countries such as South Africa, face challenges in service delivery. According to research, one of the most important pull factors that inspire customers to come to a destination, is service quality. The housekeeping department within a hospitality establishment, has been identified as a department worth investigating in terms of service quality, and the employees' perceptions thereof. Hence the study focused on the housekeeping department, "the pillar" of hotel operations. It should be noted that housekeeping services are among the most important service quality contributors towards increasing customer satisfaction.

The study applied a quantitative research approach. The SERVQUAL model was utilised to measure the perceptions of the participants regarding service quality. A structured questionnaire was administered to the housekeeping employees of Bloemfontein 3, 4 and 5-star graded hotels. Seventy respondents completed the questionnaire. The main objective of the study was to identify employee perceptions of service quality delivery in the housekeeping department, as well as to report on challenges encountered within these housekeeping departments. The results indicate that the tangibles and reliability were perceived as the most important service quality dimensions. Overall results of the study indicate a need for improvement within the housekeeping departments of the selected Bloemfontein hotels.

Keywords: service quality, employee perceptions, SERVQUAL dimensions, service quality GAPS, housekeeping department

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Herewith I, **Cornelia Geldenhuys (ID 521114 0083 088)** declare that I am a qualified, accredited language practitioner and that I have edited the following dissertation:

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by

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All changes were indicated by track changes and comments **for the student to verify, clarify aspects that are unclear, make the necessary adjustments and finalise.** The editor takes no responsibility in the instance of this not being done. The document remains the final responsibility of the author.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AHLA	American Hotel and Lodging Association
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CASERVE	Casino Service Quality
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DoT	Department of Tourism
EHL	Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne
EiJ	Expectations of the firm for item i in dimension j
EU	Europe
FRIC	Faculty Research and Innovation Committee
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HOLSERV	Hotel Service Quality
ICCA	International Congress and Convention Association
ICC	International Conference Centre
INTERSERVQUAL	Internal Service Quality
LODGSERV	Lodge Service Quality
MESE	Meetings, Exhibitions and Special Events
MMM	The Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality
N _j	Number of items in dimension j
OTAs	Online Travel Agents
P-E	Perception scores Minus the mean Expectation scores
P _{ij}	Perceived performance of the firm on item i in dimension j
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SADC	South African Development Community
SARS	Severe Acquired Respiratory Syndrome
SERVPERF	Service Performance
SERVQUAL	Service Quality
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SQ _j	Service quality of dimension j
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
TGCSA	Tourism Grading Council of South Africa
TQM	Total Quality Management model



UNWTO

United Nations World Tourism Organisation

WHO

World Health Organisation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries. It is defined as the temporary movement of people from their residential location to another for business, leisure and social reasons (Revfine, 2021; Skripak, 2018:304). The tourism industry encompasses many segments, which include transport, travel agencies, tour operators/guides, hospitality, meetings, incentives, conference and events (MICE), and tourist attractions (Business Partners, 2016). The hospitality industry is part of the broader tourism industry. It is the overall term for restaurants, hotels and recreational establishments (Melissen & Sauer, 2019:10-11). According to Statista (2023a), the tourism industry supported approximately 1,5 million jobs in 2019; with the potential to increase employment to 2,1 million jobs by 2028 (SA GCIS, 2018:2). These figures were obviously affected severely negatively by the recent pandemic, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the year 2020. The national and international travel ban prohibitions during strict COVID-19 lockdown levels significantly contributed to the loss of jobs. In South Africa, a total of 35 land ports and two seaports/harbours were brought to a complete halt (STATS SA, 2021). A total of 62 million jobs within the tourism industry were lost in 2020 (Aharon et al., 2021). The SA tourism sector lost over 320 000 jobs in 2020, reducing 780 096 in 2019 to 459 533 in 2020 (STATS SA, 2023a).

According to the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA, 2021), a survey of hotels on financial crisis indicated that 77% of hotels were forced to suspend or terminate their workers permanently or temporarily due to the impact of COVID-19. Sub-Saharan Africa is reported to have dropped occupancy rates of 21%, while South Africa's occupancy rates lowered to a devastating 16%. Foreign arrivals to South Africa dropped from 15,8 million to less than 5 million, totaling a 71% decrease. Tourists decreased from 14,8 million in 2019 to 3,9 million in 2020 (STATS SA, 2023a). Pre-COVID conditions will unfortunately not be seen before the year 2023 (Page, 2021).

The global tourism industry contributes 10,4% to the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 1:10 job creation. Besides the fact that tourism contributes towards the economy and job creation, it assists in improving people's quality of life; people destress during vacations. Also, tourism alleviates poverty in some countries, defined as pro-poor

tourism (PPT) or tourism that generates net benefits for the poor (Page, 2019:2). South African tourism contributes 3% (R130,1 billion in 2018) towards the GDP and 4,5% towards the total employment in South Africa (STATS SA, 2021).

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC, 2018:1-9), the overall South African hotel room accommodation revenue increased by 4,6% (R16,6 billion) in the year 2017 from 12,2% in year 2016 (with R21,8 billion expected for the year 2022); international guests increased by 2,4%; guests from non-Africa countries increased by 7,2%; and a 3,3% increase to R17,2 billion was expected for the year 2018. It was also anticipated that hotel occupancy rates would increase to 62,5% by 2022, prior to COVID-19. South Africa remains a popular destination. PwC (2018:9) further states that Johannesburg is included among the top 100 metropolitan destinations in the world by Euromonitor International, and Cape Town is rated as the finest business tourism city in Africa by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA). The Free State Province, which includes Bloemfontein, has great tourist attraction potential. As was stated by Mr Derek Hanekom, the former Minister of Tourism South Africa, the Free State Province is blessed with an abundance of tourist attractions that increase tourist visits. These include events and attraction sceneries such as the Mangaung African Cultural Festival (MACUFE), the Basotho Cultural Village and Clarens, the Cherry Festival, the Gariiep Dam and the Vredefort Dome (*Bloemfontein Courant*, 2016).

Some of the top tourist attractions places that can be found within Bloemfontein include the Anglo Boer War Museum, the beautiful FS Botanical gardens, Naval Hill, the National Museum and the Zanchieta Lodge and Wild Cat Reserve (Tripadvisor, 2022). The number of visitors to the Free State increased by 1,2 million from 2014 to 2015, with projections to increase these visits to 5 million by the National department of Tourism (*Bloemfontein Courant*, 2016). In 2016, the Free State received 12,8 million overnight visitors from 10,4 million in 2009, indicating an annual increase of 2%.

International visitors increased by an incredible 15% annually (2,8 million to 9,4 million visitors). There were future plans in place to market the Free State extensively. The Cheetah route and the Mangaung route (which includes Bloemfontein, Botshabelo, and Thaba 'Nchu), are major areas in the plans to be marketed to attract more visitors (*Bloemfontein Courant*, 2017).

Income in the accommodation sector (highest in hotels, motels, and inns) was 56,2 million in 2018 (an increase of 4,9%, compared to 2015) and employment increased by 4,3%, from 98 346 people (2015) to 104 714 people (2018) (STATS SA, 2018a:3, 6). STATS SA (2019:3) also indicated a growth in day (R14,2 million to R14,9 million) and overnight (R14,1 million to R17,0 million) trips within South Africa between the two quarters of the year 2019 (January to March and April to June). However, contrary to the positive statistics stated above, South African hotel occupancy rates seemed to have decreased, as indicated in global economic data indicators, charts, and forecasts 2004-2019 Monthly Percentage Statistics South Africa (CEIC, 2019). In April 2020, due to COVID-19, occupancy rates reached its lowest at 1,2%, however there is a positive turn around whereby the SA accommodation occupancy rate was reported at 36,7% in February 2023 (Statista, 2023b; CEIC, 2021). According to Al Saleem and Al-Juboori (2013:158), service quality, room facilities, prices, employees' attitudes, and cleanliness are some of the factors that affect hotel occupancy. Isabirye, Prinsloo and Pelsler (2017:13) emphasise that service quality does indeed have huge effect on occupancy levels. The main factors of the hospitality industry are service quality and customer satisfaction (Ali et al., 2021:14). This study will examine the perception of service quality from the internal customers' perspective. The focus mainly zooms in on the housekeeping departments at selected hotels in Bloemfontein. "Service quality is the golden key to open the satisfaction door for tourists" (Thi et al., 2020:179).

Service quality is an imperative aspect within the hospitality industry that impacts heightened opportunity in a competitive environment (Trilyo, 2018). The hospitality industry's main goal is to meet and satisfy guests' needs, which in turn, increase room sales and contribute towards the objective of attaining budgeted profits (Zagade & Tyagi, 2017:1076). Quality service is made up of activities conducted by hotels with the aim of meeting consumer expectations (Sulasmini & Saputra, 2015:2). It is therefore vital to measure service quality at customer level, because this assists in identifying whether the services offered are good or bad, and influences the level of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction leads to loyal customers who become free marketing agents for the establishment which, in turn, leads to increased sales and improved job performance (Tamilselvi, 2016:29-30; Fouad, Hussein & Attia, 2013:251).

Even though it is important to assess perceptions of service quality clearly from an external customer level, it is equally vital to measure service quality from an internal customer's level. This contributes towards reaching desired goals and outcomes as internal customers must constantly work and improve on quality (Vasagan, 2018:45).

Perceptions, defined as how persons interpret their impressions to give meaning to their environment, can affect productivity and result in negative issues, depending on how an employee perceives a situation (Catenacci, 2017; Adams, 2016). Hence, perceptions of employees need to be controlled, particularly due to their subjective nature. Unmonitored employee perceptions may damage a company's image. It is therefore vital for managers/employers to plant a seed of positive perceptions and understanding thereof in employees' minds (Adams, 2016).

To reach the findings of this study, three-, four- and five-star Bloemfontein hotels, graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA), were used in this study. The TGCSA Star Grading is a globally recognised quality assurance body, that grades hospitality establishments, based on its overall quality and facilities. Based on the grading criteria, 1-star graded establishments offers considerably basic facilities, while a 5-star graded establishment offers extra facilities and services (TGCSA, 2016d; TGCSA, 2016e). The section below will focus on the background issues of the study.

1.2 PROBLEM BACKGROUND

Service quality is one of the most fundamental notions within the hospitality industry (Al-Ababneh, 2016:189). Unfortunately, according to Makumbirofa and Saayman (2018:3), poor service delivery in developing countries such as South Africa is a major challenge. The authors further ascribe this poor service delivery to a lack of adequate skills, as well as the fact that the hotel employees are mostly people who are not truly passionate about the industry, but just need an income.

According to Al-Ababneh (2017:1), the quality of service is a core competitive strategy within the hotel industry; it has a positive and direct effect on competitiveness. Mbasera (2012:1) states that the quality of service, specifically within the housekeeping department, should satisfy customer specifications in order to encourage repeat business.

Köşker, Unur and Gursoy (2019:140) emphasize that the shortage of qualified hospitality labour and the high staff turnover within the hospitality industry remain a major problem. For an establishment to achieve quality service, a more stable labour force is needed to ensure standardised consistency. The new generation of skilled employees avoids the area of housekeeping within the hotel industry. Also, the fact that housekeeping is traditionally not considered as a front-line service department is a concern (Fouad et al., 2013:257).

Contradictorily, the housekeeping department is regarded to be the pillar of hotel operations for the best service delivery (Kumar & Singh, 2015:29), making housekeeping attendants' work one of the vital aspects that can improve competitiveness (Kensbock, Patiar & Jennings, 2017:1). Dinesh and Pushpakaran (2016:73) advise that, although it is vital for academics and managers to conduct research on customer perceptions regarding service quality, it is crucial to research employee perceptions of service quality, which has not been studied sufficiently.

The Free State Province has many beautiful natural and historic attraction places. Despite this fact, the residents of the province do not travel across the province (South African Government, 2019b). Ensuring that Bloemfontein hotels offer great service quality, may attract more customers, since service quality is one of the crucial "pull" factors that motivate customers to travel to a destination (Gany, 2017:47). This study aims to contribute positively towards improving service quality, more so as one of the South African Department of Tourism's (SA DoT) mandates is to promote quality tourism and services (South African Government, 2019a).

Musaba, Musaba and Hoabeb (2014:534) and Al-Ababneh (2016:189) note that the study of service quality in hotels have mainly focused on consumer expectations and perceptions. This study focuses on the employees' point of view regarding expectations and perceptions. Employees' perceptions are determinants of the nature and quality of service they will offer to the customers, especially when they interact directly with customers. Kleynhans and Zhou (2012:11348) recommend that a more in-depth examination of the major hotel departments, such as housekeeping, reception, dining, room service, and lobby, etc., be conducted in relation to service quality.

Therefore, as housekeeping is one of the departments recommended above to be studied further regarding service quality, this study attempted to contribute towards the few studies on employee perceptions of service quality in South Africa and to the non-existent studies on the Bloemfontein hotels, specifically pertaining to the housekeeping department. Besides previous studies' recommendations to conduct more research on service quality and specific departments within hotels, the interest in the housekeeping department stems from the fact that the researcher previously lectured in this specific subject. Additionally, during informal conversations with housekeeping attendants and housekeeping supervisors at Bloemfontein hotels, the researcher identified several concerns relating to a lack of the required housekeeping items. According to these employees, the lack of these items hinders the proper execution of their duties, which could lead to poor service rendering, resulting in poor service quality.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Based on the discussion above, overall service quality across the hospitality industries in South Africa lacks. Prominent levels of service quality cannot be reached without frontline and back-of-house employees, specifically in the hospitality industry. They play the most significant role, because they are the lengthening of the brand towards the customer via service quality. Employee perceptions regarding service quality are not examined as thoroughly as customer perceptions. The housekeeping department (back-of-house employees), being the heart of a hotel, needs to be treated as a front office; however, it has always been kept behind the scenes, making it a challenge for housekeeping attendants to deal professionally with guests.

Interprovincial travel to and from Free State Province is lacking, and literature mentions that service quality could be one of the determinants of selecting a destination. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine employees' perceptions of service quality and challenges that may hamper quality service delivery within the housekeeping departments of 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein, with the purpose of contributing towards mitigating these challenges within housekeeping and improving on service quality levels.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Main research question

What are hospitality employees' perceptions of service quality and what associated challenges are experienced within the housekeeping departments of 3-, 4- and 5-star graded Bloemfontein hotels?

1.4.2 Subsidiary research questions

1. What service quality dimensions, to housekeeping employees of 3-, 4- and 5-star graded hotels, are perceived to be vital?
2. What are housekeeping management's perceptions versus housekeeping employees' perceptions on service quality?
3. What are the main challenges faced by housekeeping employees, based on their perception and expectations of service quality?
4. How do perceived housekeeping service quality challenges affect the delivery of quality service?
5. Which recommendations can be made to contribute towards improving the service quality?

1.5 OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Main objective

To identify employee perceptions of service quality and associated challenges faced within the housekeeping departments of 3-, 4- and 5-star graded Bloemfontein hotels.

1.5.3 Subsidiary objectives

1. Determine service quality dimensions perceived to be vital by the housekeeping employees of 3-, 4- and 5-star graded hotels.
2. Determine the differences in housekeeping management's perceptions and housekeeping employees' perceptions on service quality.
3. Identify the main challenges faced by housekeeping employees, based on their perceptions and expectations of service quality.

4. Identify how perceived housekeeping challenges affect service quality.
5. Propose specific recommendations to contribute towards improving the service quality of housekeeping departments of the 3-, 4- and 5-star graded hotels in Bloemfontein.

1.6 AIM

The main aim of this study was to identify employee perceptions of service quality and the associated challenges they experience within the housekeeping departments of 3-, 4- and 5-star graded Bloemfontein hotels. As stated earlier, several studies have been conducted on service quality in hotels with the focus on customers' perception of the hotel as a whole. However, no research could be found that focuses on the perceptions of employees within the housekeeping departments in Bloemfontein hotels. This study desired to add to the miniscule or emerging studies on service quality, specifically within hotel housekeeping departments, by assessing the perceptions of employees, instead of consumers' perceptions. Ultimately, this study seeks to improve on the delivery of service quality in 3-, 4- and 5-star graded Bloemfontein hotels.

1.7 CONCEPT OF SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality (SERVQUAL) is a multi-faceted theory used to measure quality, with the application of five dimensions, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility in services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985:42; Nambiar et al., 2019:46). Service quality is a vital aspect due to the ever-increasing expectations of guests and competitiveness of establishments (Poor, Poor & Darkhaneh, 2013:36). To date, the subjects *service quality*, *customer satisfaction* and *customer value* are still strongly investigated within the hospitality industry (Kim, 2017:2). This is not surprising, as they are the main factors of success within the hospitality industry.

Service quality is a coalition of two words. The first word, 'service' refers to an intangible activity that is offered; however, cannot be owned by the receiver. The second word, 'quality', refers to well-executed methods to reach efficiency and performance within a business (Ramya, Kowsalya & Dharanipriya, 2019:38). Service quality speaks of the extent to which service providers can satisfy the needs of customers and meet or exceed their expectations (Al-jazzazi & Sultan, 2017:276), when these expectations are

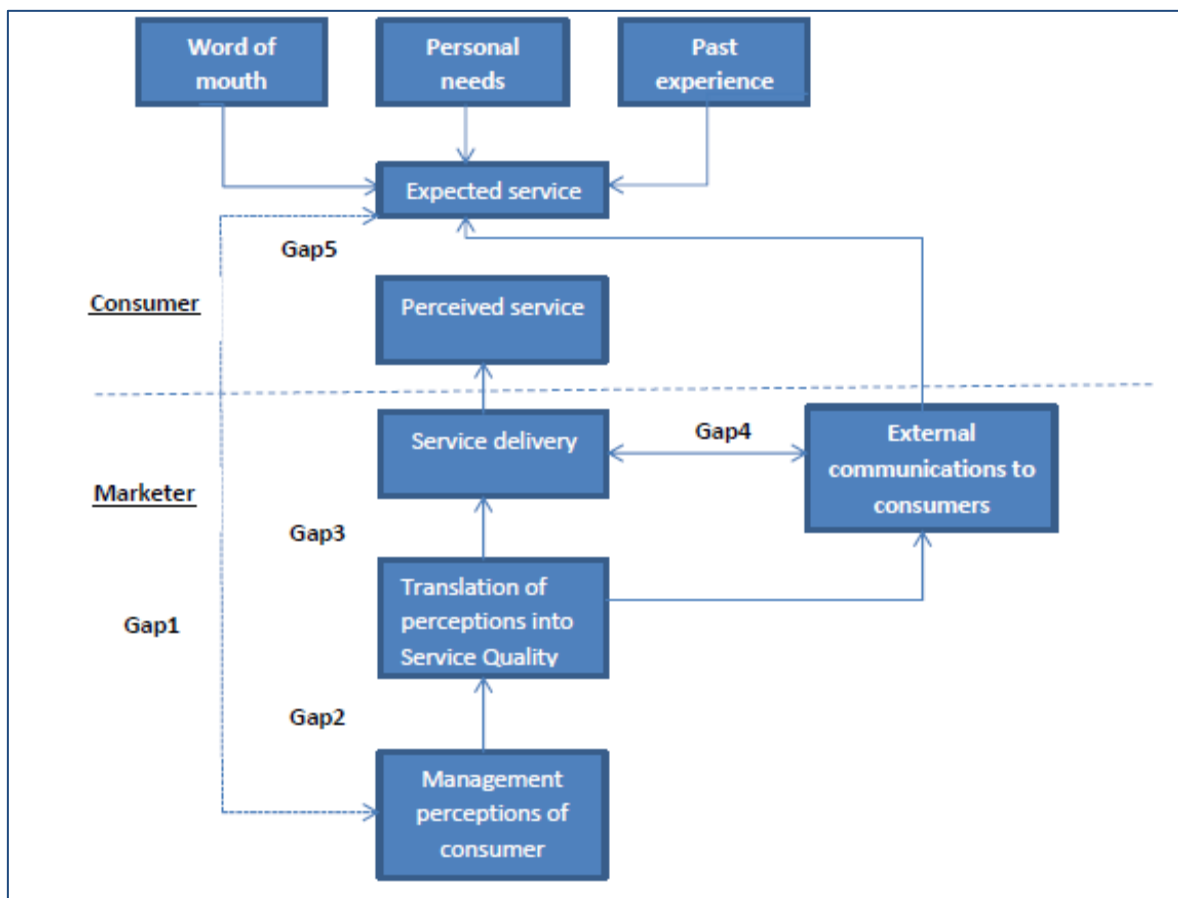
met, then quality is achieved. It is a challenge to measure service quality, because the measurement thereof is based on perceptions of individuals, which are rather subjective (Bengtsson, Hertzberg & Rask, 2020:6). According to the developers of SERVQUAL, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985:42) and Yarimoglu (2014:80), *service quality* is much more difficult to measure as opposed to measuring the quality of goods, as goods can be judged by their make, shape, colour, feel and/or label. Therefore, *service quality* is measured and judged by comparing consumer expectations with actual service performed to ensure excellent service quality perceptions. Expectations that exceed actual service relates to less satisfactory quality, which means the dissatisfaction of customers. It is therefore important for management to measure service quality and establish expectations that are met (Abedi et al., 2015:273). The following sections explain how service quality can be measured.

1.7.1 Measuring service quality

Various service quality measuring tools used to measure service quality have been developed over the years. These include Service Quality (SERVQUAL), Service Performance (SERVPERF), Internal Service Quality (INTERSERVQUAL), Lodge Service Quality (LODGSERV), Hotel Service Quality (HOLSERV), Casino Service Quality (CASERV) and DINESERV for restaurants. Though HOLSERV is a newer one-column, shortened model for hotels (Subha, 2020:316), the SERVQUAL model was preferred for this study. The SERVQUAL model is the most popular or prevailing, applicable service quality measuring model to the tourism and hospitality industry, also a prime measure of employees' perception of service quality (Kensbock et al., 2017:3; Shah, Sanghvi & Brahmhatt, 2017:47; Al-Ababneh, 2016:190; Colby, 2015; Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011:227). Even though the new HOLSERV model (adapted from SERVQUAL model) is shorter and simpler, SERVQUAL gives more information and analyses the gap between expectations and performance, allowing managers to accurately identify and highlight the weaker elements of service quality (Tefera & Govender, 2016:3). It is for these reasons that this current study made use of the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL model is extensively discussed in Chapter 3. The SERVQUAL model provides a complete "scoring system" for industries to ensure improved service delivery (Wang et al., 2015:34). The SERVQUAL model is a tool that was developed and refined over many years, to measure people's expectations and

perceptions of an organisation (Parasuraman Zeithaml & Berry, 1988:17; Fick & Ritchie, 1991:3). The SERVQUAL model reviews the current level of service quality delivery of an establishment, based on the extent to how the *service gaps*, explained in the subsequent sections, are. Parasuraman (cited in Grigoroudis and Siskos, 2010:69), states that if *service quality* is defined in the context of the SERVQUAL model, it is “the degree and direction of discrepancy between consumer perceptions and expectations”.

The model below illustrates a series of gaps that can delay or hinder the delivery of quality services to customer.



Source: Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1991:337); Sharma (2014:481)

Figure 1.1: Service Quality Conceptual Model

Mulder (2018) states that the gaps in Figure 1.1 above may be utilised to pinpoint and solve deficiencies in the service. It compares the expected service quality by customers and the quality of service offered by an establishment. According to the model, the five gaps are the main sources of service quality issues. GAP 1 is the discrepancy between

what customers expect and what management believes customers will expect, while Gap 2 is the difference between managements' perceptions of customers' expectations and service quality specifications. Gap 3 is the difference between service quality specifications and service delivered, while Gap 4 refers to the difference between service delivery and what is communicated to customers externally about service delivery. Gap 5, which exists because of Gap 1 to 4, is the difference between customers' expectations and perceived service. This means Gap 5 is automatically reduced or closed when Gaps 1 to 4 are reduced or closed (Kibret & Dinber, 2016:55; Shahin, 2004:123). Thus, meeting or exceeding customers' expectations is fundamental to guaranteeing that good service quality is met (Parasuraman et al., 1991:337-338).

The wider the gap between each item, the bigger the problem of delivery of service quality, with ensuing dissatisfied customers (Abedi et al., 2015:273). These gaps are the foundation of the SERVQUAL model. The gaps are also elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

1.8 THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY CONTEXT

According to Verlinden (2018), some people are born to work in the hospitality industry, while some are simply not. The author elaborates that a hospitality applicant must possess skills such as listening, clear communication, customer orientation, stress tolerance, quality orientation, high work standards and multitasking. Puri (2018) emphasises that with the fast-growing and developing hospitality industry, more dedicated staff will be needed. Furthermore, "If a worker's personality doesn't fit the job requirements, he or she will not be motivated by external factors, no matter how tasty the carrot or painful the stick" (University of Iowa, 2013).

Mogelonsky (2018) states that housekeepers must be on par with changes to increase and adjust service delivery that will satisfy the "modern traveller", being millennials and centennials, who happen to be the majority of the hospitality industry's customers. The author further emphasises the importance of professional communication with guests and ways for housekeeping attendants to send these messages to the relevant superiors promptly, as this could build stronger relations with guests. The hospitality industry should be able to adapt to evolving customers' consumption and travel

behaviour, as well as to attract the new generation of technophiles, or those enthusiastic about new technology (Kansakar, Munir & Shabani, 2018:1).

World-wide, the hospitality and tourism industry has, in seven years consecutively, experienced growth. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2017:4-5), an increase in international overnight visitors has occurred from 1 189 million in 2015 to 1 235 million in 2016. Also, USD 1 220 billion were spent internationally on accommodation, food and beverages, entertaining, shopping and other goods and services in tourism destinations in 2016. Furthermore, world-wide, international tourist arrivals increased by 6% to 1,4 billion in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). This was gratifying, as it was in line with the forecasted 3,8% increase per year for the period 2010 to 2020.

Despite the indicated drop in international tourists' arrivals in South Africa as stated by the ANC chairperson, Mr Mahumapelo (2019), the Hospitality Outlook: 2019-2023 (PwC, 2019:10) indicates that overall room revenue in South Africa, Nigeria, Mauritius, Kenya and Tanzania increased by 1,9% in 2017, and increased by 7,4% in 2018. It also states that three-star graded hotels accumulated 31% of the total hotel revenue in South Africa. However, overall, South African room revenue alone decreased by only 0,5% in 2018. Nevertheless, a modest improvement was expected (PwC, 2019). STATS SA (2018b:3) indicates that hotels were the most income-generating type of accommodation in July 2019, while the income from accommodation increased by 3,6% from R3 497 million (July 2018) to R3 633 million (July 2019).

There are plans to develop the Free State Province with envisaged projects or opportunities, of building the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) aerotropolis development, said to produce R100 billion profit for the city of Bloemfontein. The plan of this project is to build an International Conference Centre (ICC) and hotels along the N8 route, whereby the project will create 11 000 jobs (MMM, 2017:50; News Update, 2013). An aerotropolis is a metropolitan subregion whereby the layout, infrastructure and economy are centred on an airport (Kasarda, 2015:44). Additionally, Premier Hotels and Resorts will also be expanding within South Africa. They will build a new three-star hotel in Bloemfontein, including a four-star Premier Hotel and a three-star Inn in KwaZulu-Natal (SA ETNW, 2019). It is evident that a competent work force will be

required in numbers to sustain this local growth within the hospitality and tourism industry.

1.9 CURRENT HOUSEKEEPING CHALLENGES AND TRENDS AFFECTING SERVICE DELIVERY AND QUALITY

Kensbock et al. (2017:2, 9-10) state that hotel room attendants are fundamental to guests' satisfaction. However, being continually exposed to heavy workloads, chemicals, biological pathogens, and time pressure to complete their work within specified periods hinders the delivery of service quality. In addition, Mogelonsky (2018) highlights that housekeeping departments could be suffering from a shortage of staff, coupled with the fact that housekeeping positions are disregarded as a career. In addition, housekeeping departments are not millennium-customer friendly. The fact that technology has made housekeeping attendants the face of the hotel or direct contacts because of mobile check-in add to these challenges. The author further suggests that interpersonal skills need to be taught within housekeeping departments, amongst other ideas as a solution. All of the above may currently contribute towards bad delivery of service quality within a housekeeping department. However, different types of hotels have different challenges, different resource availability, etc.; hence it was vital to conduct this current study in Bloemfontein and pinpoint the issues faced by the housekeeping department that may be preventing them from fully accomplishing delivery of required or determined service quality.

1.10 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Al-Ababneh (2016:189-193) conducted a study on employees' perspectives of service quality in hotels in Jordan. He utilised the SERVQUAL model on 238 respondents of 10 four- and five-starred hotels. Results indicate that service quality of the five-starred hotels were higher than that of four-starred hotels. Kensbock et al. (2017:9) conducted a study using qualitative research to give women housekeeping attendants 'a voice' through in-depth interviews relating to their daily duties and experience of their job. The study was limited to five-star hotels and to 46 women only in Australia; therefore, the authors recommend that a broader sample, in varied star-rated hotels, be researched regarding workload and remuneration. Results showed that women housekeeping attendants felt that housekeeping trolleys, making the beds (some being king sized, and

having to be moved around) drained them physically, and although they identified bathroom cleaning as one of the most important areas to clean, the constant movement and scrubbing caused arm injuries. Workers felt disrespected by some of the guests regarding the extra dirty state of their rooms. Results also indicated that these women housekeeping attendants felt the job was hard and exploitative.

Al Saleem and Al-Juboori (2013:142-159) conducted a quantitative study, using a survey on 180 employees of four- and five-star hotels in Amman, Jordan. The objective of the study was to determine factors that impacted hotel occupancy rates. Findings indicated that the occupancy rate of a hotel was influenced by its physical characteristics (such as its location, size, and room count), internal (such as service quality, room amenities, prices, and staff attitudes) and external (such as economic status, exchange rate, political situation, and intense competition) factors.

Kawachart and Sriboonjit (2013:1-11) examined the service quality of luxury hotels' housekeeping in Bangkok regarding its greatest contribution towards customer satisfaction. The Lodging Quality Index (LQI) model, with four dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and communication, was used to measure service quality within housekeeping. However, a final model that consisted of reliability, responsiveness, understanding, and competency was used. Two hundred customers completed questionnaires, using a five-point Likert scale format, ranging from 1- "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". This was to find results on customers perceptions of housekeeping service quality of luxury hotels in Bangkok. Results from the final model indicated that competency scored the highest.

Al Khattab and Aldehayyat (2011:226-233) conducted a study on customers' perceptions of service quality in a Jordanian Hotel. A performance-only measurement tool (SERVPERF) was administered successfully to 280 customers who stayed in three-, four- and five-star hotels in Aqaba and Petra. A questionnaire was used to measure quality service through the five dimensions of reliability, empathy, assurance, responsiveness and tangibles. Results indicated that empathy and tangibles scored the lowest.

Musaba et al. (2014:533-543) examined hotel employees' perception of service quality in Namibia, Windhoek. Data were collected from 77 employees using the SERVQUAL

model. Results indicated that employee perceptions of quality service delivery in the hotels were lower than their expectations. The perceived lack of concern for employers as well as fair treatment, treating employees as a valuable resource, empowering staff to independently respond to consumers, and training employees for efficiency and effectiveness were the key issues noted.

Recently conducted studies on service quality pertaining to employees' perceptions were either to;

- improve on the Taiwan hospital quality improvement strategy by using the Total Quality Management model (TQM) (Tsai, Wu & Tsai, 2018:13-25); or
- improve on examination councils in Sweden (Promkaew & Tembo, 2017:1-6), the SERVQUAL model was used, or
- measure service quality from call centre employees' perspectives in Mauritius by Ramseook-Munhurrin, Naidoo and Lukea-Bhiwajee (2010:47-58).

The only hotel-based service quality study found within the South African context was conducted from the customer's perspective. Kleynhans and Zhou (2012:11342-11349) conducted a quantitative study on the service quality of selected hotels in Pretoria. The study sample was 200 overnight customers. A self-administered questionnaire with 23 closed questions, using a 7-point Likert scale was used. The questionnaire comprised three sections, which included demographics and travelling characteristics, the SERVQUAL model to measure the service quality expectations, and respondents' perceptions of service quality provided by the hotels. Results indicated that expectations were higher than envisaged in all five dimensions of service quality, being reliability, empathy, assurance, responsiveness, and tangibles. Reliability had the lowest gap score and results indicated that guests attached high expectations to the tangible elements of the hotel.

No study conducted in Bloemfontein focusing on housekeeping employees' perceptions to deal with service delivery challenges affecting service quality was found. The only current study that to some extent touched on service quality within neighbouring provinces of the Free State, was a case study regarding visitors' perceptions of destination attractiveness in Kimberly, Northwest, by Gany (2017:31, 47). The study mentions that quality accommodation and service quality are two of the crucial

destination attractiveness attributes or elements that assist customers in deciding which place to travel to. The researcher contends that if Bloemfontein Hotels were known to deliver great service quality, they might ensure firm relationships with current customers and attract new customers, resulting in high occupancy and wealth for the local economy.

1.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is the application of a researcher's chosen guiding theory or set of concepts to gain an understanding regarding the phenomenon being researched (Imenda, 2014:189). According to the University of California's Research Guides (USC Libraries, 2019) and Herek (2011:137-138), a theoretical framework "must demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic of your research paper and that relate to the broader areas of knowledge being considered". The authors further stipulate,

- Clarification of theoretical assumptions in a theoretical framework strengthens a research study, as it can allow the researcher to detect vital overlooked or underlooked variables.
- A theoretical framework can assist to connect a researcher to preliminary knowledge and assist in prioritising variables and research questions.
- A theoretical framework allows a researcher to transfer from describing a phenomenon to generalising a phenomenon.
- A theoretical framework ascertains limits to generalisation as it stipulates the main variables that influence a phenomenon in question.

A worthy theory must give a strong detailed picture of the phenomenon it seeks to describe (Imenda, 2014:187). The theory of this study was based on the SERVQUAL Model.

1.11.1 The SERVQUAL model

SERVQUAL is best used as a way of measuring the quality of a service, as opposed to a tangible product. The gaps indicated in 1.7.1 are the groundwork of SERVQUAL. This

measuring tool utilizes the five dimensions that explain the consumer's experience to discover perceptions of performance and expectations (Kleynhans & Zhou, 2014:39; Colby, 2015; Mulder, 2018).

1.12 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Regoniel (2015) defines a conceptual framework as the researcher's understanding of how particular variables link with one another. He further states that "it is the researcher's map in pursuing the investigation". The variables, which mean complex phenomena that have been broken into simplified/manageable pieces in the study, should be identified in the framework (Regoniel, 2012), as in Figure 1.2 below.

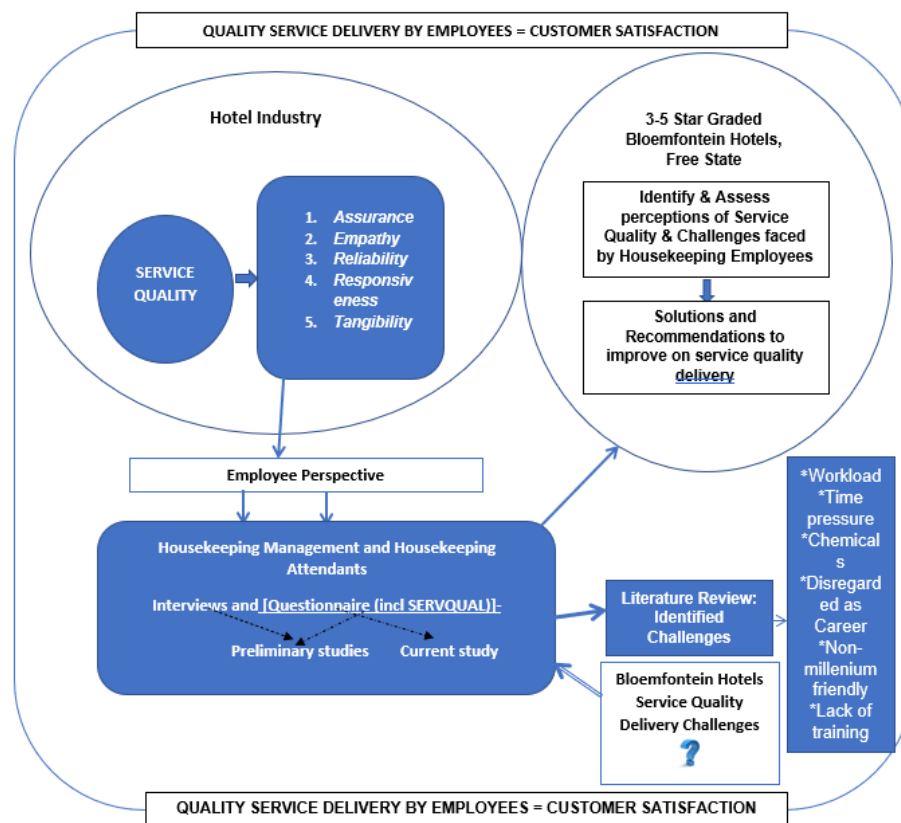


Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework of the study

Figure 1.2 illustrates that service quality in the hotel industry is measured using the popular model, namely SERVQUAL. This encompasses five dimensions, which are assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility. These dimensions are determinants of required quality service delivery levels. The illustration further shows

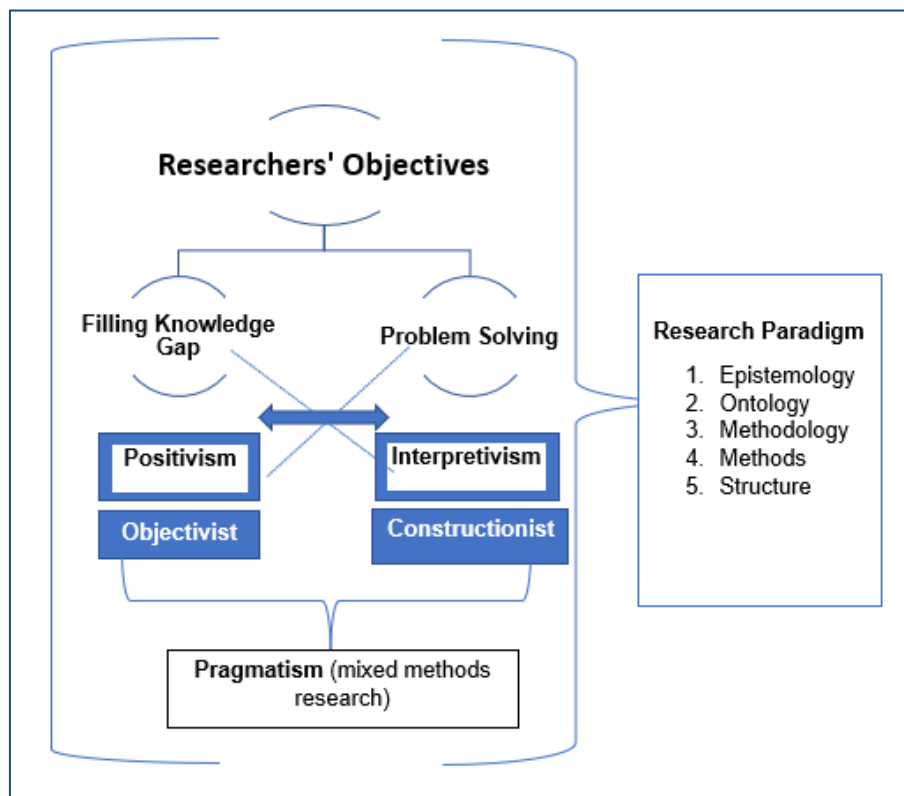
that the preliminary literature review conducted from an employee's perspective revealed the challenges stated above in various areas of the world, excluding the Free State or Bloemfontein. The preliminary literature review used interviews or questionnaires; some used both.

This study envisages using the underlined tool, a self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix B), which includes the SERVQUAL model, to ascertain the employee perceptions of service quality and challenges in order to suggest solutions that may result in good delivery of quality service.

1.13 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY/PARADIGM

According to Fouché, Strydom and Roestenburg (2021:5), a philosophy is a way of interpreting and understanding the world, is multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary by nature, and supported by a certain paradigm. Kuhn (cited in Shuttleworth & Wilson, 2008) define a research paradigm as "the practices that define a scientific discipline at a certain point in time". The authors further state that a research paradigm is comprised

of all the commonly accepted views regarding the subject of study, resolutions, the undertakings and the direction of the research study.



Source: Adapted from Badewi (2015)

Figure 1.3: Research Paradigm Model

As indicated in Figure 1.3 above, researchers conduct research for various reasons and with different objectives. Firstly, there are researchers that review books and literature, send surveys to people with the aim of filling a knowledge gap, and believe there is a single reality. These researchers are closer to positivism and are objectivists (seeking for single reality, might propose hypothesis from the literature reviewed). Then there are researchers who want to solve a problem, being closer to interpretivism and are constructionists (meaning they look at “reality” from a different perspective). These researchers believe there is more than one reality. However, there is no wrong or right way; some researchers will solve a problem via positivism and others via interpretivism, or use both ways of conducting research. It would depend on their logic or rationality (Badewi, 2015).

Positivism is more quantitative research and interpretivism is more descriptive or qualitative by nature (Patel, 2015). In conducting research, advanced concepts or research behaviour are adopted, namely research philosophies or research paradigms. These research paradigms are epistemology, ontology, methodology, methods and structure. Epistemology is about how knowledge can be created, learned or developed, and communicated (Scotland, 2012:9), while ontology is concerned with “what is”, as well as the researcher’s perception of what and how things are. It is objective and quantifiable, and measured independently of the researcher and research tools (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:218). The methodology and the methods are concerned with the “why, what, from where, when and how data is collected and analysed” and precise procedures to be utilised in the collection of data and data analysis (Scotland, 2012:9).

A research paradigm creates a complete view of the way knowledge is viewed, which increases the quality of research (Patel, 2015). Different paradigms are based on varying ontological and epistemological estimated hypothesis (reality and knowledge supporting research approach and design) and views; therefore, they can never be empirically proven or disproven. These estimated hypothesis or assumptions are echoed in the methodology and methods to be used by the researcher (Scotland, 2012:9). Since this study is quantitative by nature, the information above denotes this study to be on an ontological and positivism level.

1.14 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The research approach is powered by paradigm nature relating to its characteristic of being qualitative, quantitative or mixed method (Fouché et al., 2021:11). Yin (2014:28) elucidates research design as a logical plan that assists with getting from “here” to “there”, meaning the stating of enquiries or set research questions and eventually getting to the findings and conclusion. The author further explains that research design includes a “between” or the collection and analysis of data, which elaborates on how to get “there”. Mustafa (2010:85) and Kothari (2004:31) describe research design as the conceptual structure within which research is conducted, also as the blueprint for collection, measurement and analysis of data.

This study assumed a survey design, which is descriptive (to present basic information about the respondents and the issues under study) and exploratory (the focus is to

determine the needs and goals of a particular group) by nature (Nardi, 2018:10-11). A survey design is described as “a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purposes of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members” (Avedian, 2014).

According to Nardi (2018:16), quantitative surveying is more cost-effective, suitable for large samples and for enquiring about opinions and attitudes, as well as guaranteeing anonymity. Quantitative research is also described as a numeral way of measuring variables or measuring amounts of data collected (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:112). The approach was quantitative, since hospitality and tourism research is a huge phenomenon that requires quantified information to reach substantial findings (Ezeuduji, 2013:4). Therefore, the SERVQUAL, which is quantitative by nature (Lupo, 2013:7097), was part of the questionnaire for this study.

1.15 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Alvi (2016:10-11) describes a research population as the entire number of members or elements (individual, household, factory, marketplace, or school) who meet a particular specified criterion for a research investigation. A sample is furthermore explained as a smaller number of people selected from a population for investigation purposes. Total or complete/whole-frame population sampling will be used for this study. This is a form of non-probability/purposive sampling whereby the entire population is investigated (Lund Research Ltd., 2012). Therefore, for this study, all the Bloemfontein 3-, 4- and 5-star graded, formal accommodation hotels formed part of this study. Formal accommodation hotels are classified as establishments that offer a minimum of 10-roomed accommodation, with full or limited service to guests and have a reception area and a dining facility (TGCSA, 2019:4). According to Kumar (2011:207), purposive sampling is about the researcher’s judgement of who the best people are to go to who are likely to be in a position to have the required information. It is also emphasised that it is “choosing particular participants who can provide certain desired perspectives on a topic or issues” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:303). Therefore, all staff members within the housekeeping department of the hotels within the sample were invited to participate in this study.

According to the TGCSA (2016c), there are 12 graded accommodation establishments in Bloemfontein that may be classified as hotels. These hotels are as follows:

5-star hotels:

- The Royal Fischer Hotel
- Anta Boga Hotel

4-star hotels:

- City Living Boutique Hotel
- Protea Hotel by Marriott Bloemfontein
- Protea Hotel by Marriott Bloemfontein Willow Lake
- Southern Sun Bloemfontein
- Windmill Lodge (Windmill Casino)

3-star hotels:

- Bloem Hotel Conference and Spa
- BON Hotel Bloemfontein Central
- City Lodge Bloemfontein
- President Hotel
- Premier Hotel Splendid Inn Bloemfontein

1.16 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection steps set boundaries for a research study. It refers to the collection of information through various methods (Creswell, 2014:239). Kumar (2011:26), Hancock and Algozzine (2006:51) and Kothari (2004:96) stipulate principal methods of collecting data as direct observation, interviews and the administering of questionnaires.

The data collection tool for this study is a self-administered questionnaire, consisting of two sections. Section one assembled demographic information of the employees, such as gender, age, position and practical work experience in the tourism and hospitality industry. The second section aimed to measure the employees' perceptions of service

quality using the SERVQUAL model, using the Likert scale of 1 to 4; 1 being “strongly disagree”, 2 for “disagree”, 3 for “agree” and 4 being “strongly agree”. Permission to gather data from all Bloemfontein 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels was requested in writing. The questionnaires were hand delivered by the researcher to the relevant managers of each housekeeping department within the respective Bloemfontein hotels for the employees to complete. The researcher then collected the surveys from the departmental managers after a stipulated period.

1.17 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The “validity of a measurement instrument is the extent to which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:128). It is about the accuracy of research results (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013:234). According to Punch and Oancea (2014:295-297), Durbarry (2018:111) and Middleton (2019), a measuring tool is reliable or consistent if it produces the same results when given to the same respondents to complete again, under the same conditions, but at a different time. Durbarry (2018:111) provides an example of a weight scale that, if used repeatedly by the same person, must yield the same weight reading. Quantitative research uses reliability by establishing the trustworthiness of the research through examining the internal consistency of the measuring tools as well as pre-testing the tool (Malakoff, 2012). The validity and reliability of this study are discussed in Chapter 4 under section 4.7.

1.18 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is described as organising, retrieving the collected data, and dividing them into smaller components, coding and combining them, and identifying patterns, using tools (computer programs), if required (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010:750). Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 27, was used to analyse the data. This was achieved with the assistance of a statistician. Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted.

1.19 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Polonsky and Waller (2015:79) emphasise that research must be undertaken in such a manner that it does not, intentionally, or unintentionally, psychologically, financially, or socially harm participants. This study observed all the rules of conducting ethically comprehensive research. As detailed by Polonsky and Waller (2015:84), these rules included:

- Voluntary participation – The managers and staff members to participate in the research would not be coerced or pressured, but rather be invited to participate. Clarifications that participation is not an obligation, and that withdrawal is without any negative consequences should be stated.
- Informed consent and permission – The participants should clearly understand what it is that the researcher wants them to do by communicating the aims and objectives of the study. A formal consent sheet, on the CUT letterhead, should be sent to participants. Also, permission from the 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein has been requested to conduct the study and gather the essential data.
- Confidentiality and anonymity – The delicate information provided, through the interviews, including documents obtained, must be treated as highly confidential. The rights of participants should be protected; therefore, anonymity shall be maintained.
- The potential for harm – The research methods utilised in this study should not cause harm to any of the participants.

1.20 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The limitations identified are as follows:

- The limited literature on the perception of employees about housekeeping within South Africa.
- The willingness and availability of the chosen hotel employees to participate in the study.
- Time constraints to conduct the research study.

- Only possibilistic generalisation may be achieved, meaning that results cannot be generalised to all hotels, but only to those of existent similarities of the selected (Blatter & Haverland, 2012:31).

1.21 CHAPTER LAYOUT

This study is comprised of five chapters in total.

Chapter 1 – Introductory Background to the Study

The chapter covers the introductory background to the study, objectives of the research, problem statement, research methodology, literature review and previous studies conducted. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks, including the collection and analysis of data, are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2 – The Hospitality Industry Context

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the hospitality industry context, and the importance thereof. The history of hotels and hotel classifications and the grading system used in South Africa are elaborated on in this chapter.

Chapter 3 – Service Quality and the Housekeeping Department

The SERVQUAL model will be elaborated upon, with specific emphasis on its dimensions, gaps, and the role of employee perception on service quality. The housekeeping department and its key players are also explained in this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

The chapter includes the research methodology discussion, research approach and design and data collection methods (quantitative analysis, employee service measuring via the SERVQUAL model). The chapter will also elaborate on the quality assurance and analysis of data.

Chapter 5 – Results and Discussions

This chapter will present the analysed data and discuss findings of the study. This chapter answers the research questions of this study.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

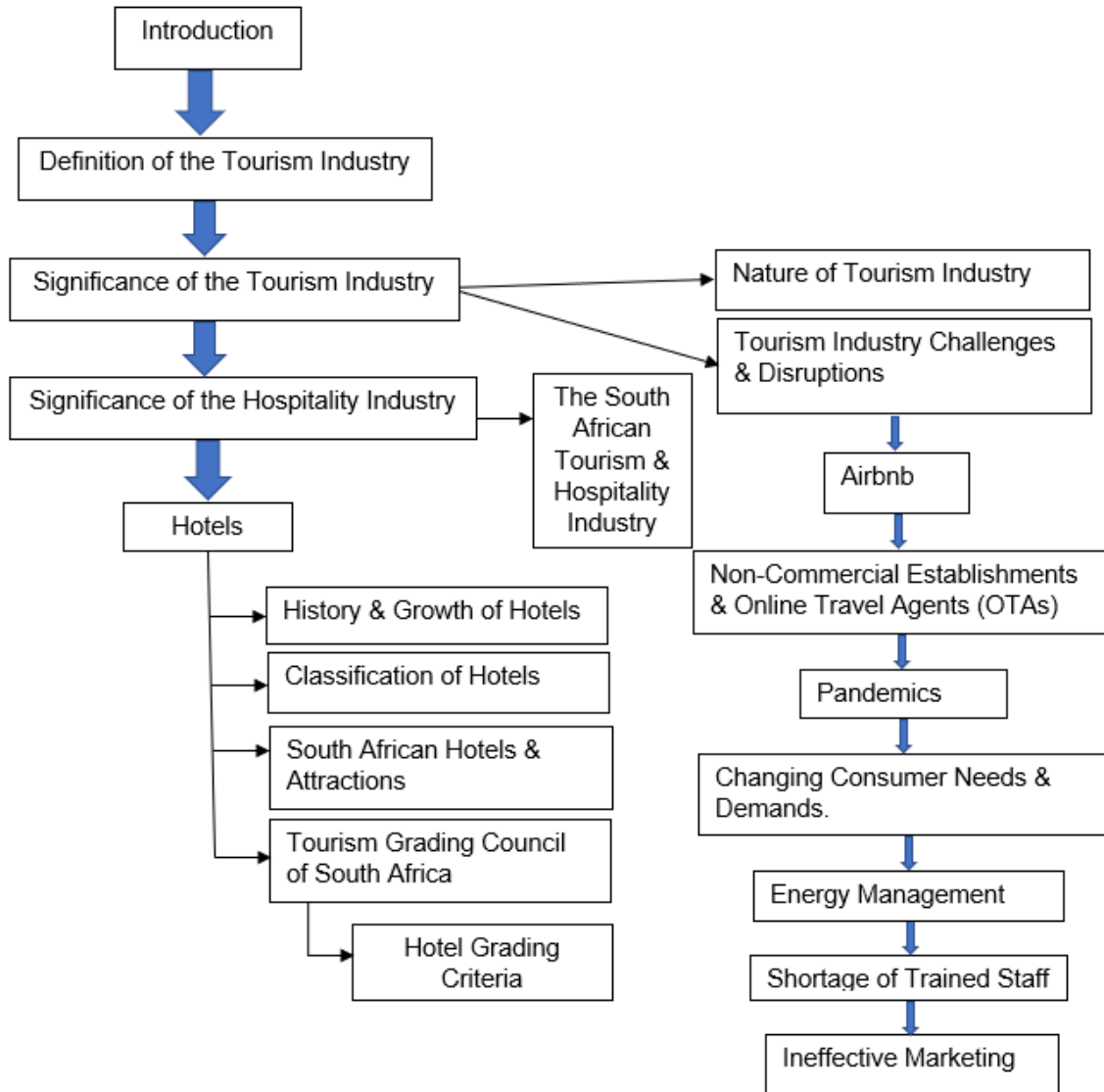
The chapter will conclude the study. Recommendations to enhance the service quality of the selected 3- to 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein are made. Also, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are stated in this chapter.

1.22 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher provided a general summary of the research plan, outlining the problem statement and background information, the research questions and objectives, as well as the chapter's structure and brief literature review of the study. The following chapter will provide a more thorough literature review of the hospitality and tourism sector context, the many types of hotels in South Africa, as well as the grading system.

CHAPTER 2: THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY CONTEXT

2.1 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER



2.2 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will firstly define and discuss the international tourism industry, the significance of this industry in South Africa, and the relationship between the tourism industry and the hospitality industry. The South African hospitality industry will then be elaborated upon, including external threats, trends and challenges that this industry faces. This chapter will therefore focus on the hospitality industry, more specifically the hotel segment of it.

2.3 DEFINITION OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Sedarati, Santos and Pintassilgo (2019:264) state that defining tourism is complex. However, it is an industry that is linked to clear features. These features are those that arise when people embark on a journey, which may be local or international, for various reasons such as engaging in business, recreational activities, health, sport, vacation, study, or even religious purposes (Camilleri, 2018:2-4).

Tourism is defined as the movement (which includes provision of goods and services for the people or tourists) of people/visitors or tourists for business or leisure reasons. These goods and services provided may be broken down into accommodation and lodging, food and beverages, recreation and entertainment, convention, events management, and travel services (Skripak, 2018:304).

According to Camilleri (2018:6), the main sectors of the tourism industry include the accommodation segment (includes hotels, guesthouses, bed and breakfast, guesthouses, and camping sites); the transport segment such as airlines and cruises, ancillary services (the extra value-added on a travel package customers book with their trips, such as car rentals, travel insurance, food and beverages, entertainment), and sales and distribution (travel agents, tour guides, national tourism offices).

2.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, which assists in improving economic development significantly (Meo et al., 2020:58; Park & Jeong, 2019:1; Vehbi, 2012:99-100). According to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, the tourism industry has grown for ten consecutive years. The tourism industry is quite resistant, as proven by the world-wide recorded 1,5 billion international tourist arrivals in 2019, with a 3% to 4% growth prediction for 2020 (UNWTO, 2020). Lock (2020), noted that a total of 2,9 trillion dollars was contributed by travel and tourism world-wide in 2019. The authors also indicate that despite the growth, the tourism industry experiences major trends and challenges to which it must adjust. These trends and challenges include climate change, green travel changes, eco-friendly/green accommodation, Airbnb, and pandemics.

According to Statistics South Africa (STATS SA, 2023a) South African tourism has contributed 3,7% towards the South African gross domestic product in 2019. The tourism industry is a huge sector, assisting in the growth of other economic branches, with benefits that include:

- Boost of both the local economy and the country's economy at large – spending encountered by tourists is utilised for local government budgeting in the form of taxes. The second portion goes to other sectors of the economy that provide products and services to meet the tourism industry's needs. Lastly, the monies from tourists are used in other economic units such as food and transportation.
- Boosts economic growth by directly and indirectly providing job opportunities. This includes jobs within hotels and restaurants, further creating travel agents that provide jobs to more people. This benefits the standard of living locally, which results in the local community spending more as well.
- The government benefits tax-wise from entities that emerge from the existence of the tourism industry. These include companies such as construction and financial trusts, road network, water supply, food and beverage industries, telephone services, external laundry companies, cinemas, and museums.
- Boosts local product exports, as 15–20% of total tourist spending is on gifts, clothing and souvenirs. All these benefits prove the importance and magnitude of the tourism industry (Bunghez, 2016:3; Dinu, 2017:73-74).

2.4.1 The nature of the tourism industry

The tourism industry is not a product, but a service of which its yields cannot be measured physically (Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997:1). This industry is sensitive to change, although constantly changing, since it is linked to various organisations (such as education, economics, health, finance and transport), with human activities and events (Bauer, 2014:1). The tourism industry cannot exist without the transportation and accommodation sectors. Transportation consists of national and international air travel (to reach extreme, remote areas), water travel (boat) and overland travel (for shorter distances – travel via train, bus, or car). Transport makes it possible for tourists to move from one destination to the other. The accommodation sector consists of hotels, bed-

and-breakfast establishments, travel inns and more service or self-catering accommodation facilities (Camilleri, 2018:7-8,12). The industry is, however, faced with many challenges. The sections below will elaborate further on these challenges.

2.4.2 Tourism industry challenges and/or disruptors

According to South African Tourism (2018:30) and Steyn and Wood (2018), the management of delivering quality service within the hospitality and tourism industry is affected globally by what is stated as “disruptors in the industry” such as Airbnb and non-commercial establishments like TripAdvisor. These disruptors are discussed below:

2.4.2.1 Airbnb

Airbnb is estimated to a market capitalisation value of 67.31 billion dollars (CompaniesMarketCap.com, 2023). It is stated that Airbnb customers are satisfied with the services they receive and that could result in hotels suffering in terms of demand (Blal, Singal & Templin, 2018:90).

According to Blal (2019) and City78 (2019), Airbnb is one of the greatest disruptors within the hospitality industry. They further stipulate that Airbnb’s advantage of not having to abide by traditional hotel regulations further toughens the competition. Millennials, who are the largest generation (75% of consumers and travellers by 2025), have grown fond of Airbnb due to the reasons that location options are vastly diverse, local culture can be experienced since the location is within local communities, as well as the opportunity of getting to know the people within the area of a particular Airbnb (Airbnb, 2016:2, 9). Additionally, guests are attracted to Airbnbs as they tend to be cheaper than hotels, conveniently located, offer a simple experience, as well as the convenience of the availability of basic household items (Blal et al., 2018:86). Gerdeman (2018), claims that Airbnb do not have much of an effect on hotel occupancy as they just expand the capacity for rooms. Data analysed by Haywood et al. (2019:3), states that hotel occupancy was quite higher than Airbnb occupancy and that Airbnb was higher at places where hotel occupancy was already high. According to Knutson (cited in Weng, 2018:2,10-11), the condition of the guestroom, cleanliness, comfortability, facilities, brand, and good maintenance are the forefront decision makers of customers

on whether to choose a hotel or Airbnb. He further states that the universal rating and classification systems of hotels assist in the selection of accommodation.

2.4.2.2 Non-commercial establishments and online travel agents (OTAs) within the hospitality industry

Nguyen and Coudounaris (2015:163) state that the influence of non-commercial establishments such as online reviews and social media within the hotel industry is immense. Firstly, online reviews and social media provide customers with insights and high transparency. Secondly, they can be a source to achieve excellent service, as well as a tool to contribute towards the success of a business. The authors further mention that this robust trend within the travel industry, whereby hotel seekers rely on posted online opinions to make a final decision on which hotel to book at can affect the sales of hotels either negatively or positively to a degree. There are claims that even though hotels and OTAs should work in partnership, they are somehow competing with one another in terms of gaining guests and striving for return guests. In addition, the fact that there are no clear structures for hotels to work with OTAs is a challenge (Liao, Hsu & Chang, 2019:1-2).

2.4.2.3 Pandemics

A pandemic is described as the spread of a new disease across the globe (WHO, 2010). These pandemics cause considerable illness and deaths, and how a country responds to a pandemic may cause long-term damaging effects on an economy, as well as political, social and economic disruption (Madhav et al., 2017). Practical examples of pandemics would be the Severe Acquired Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the most recent Corona virus (COVID-19). As stated in section 2.4.1, the tourism industry is connected to various disciplines that depend on human endeavours, such as health. The SARS outbreak of 2003 in Hong Kong caused many hotels to find themselves empty, causing job losses (Bauer, 2014:1).

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, countries were required to bring international and even national travel to a standstill; thus, affecting the tourism and hospitality industry extensively. The total revenue drop was estimated at 17% in 2020 (Lock, 2020). As infections increased, lockdown measures (described as “mandatory

geographic quarantines to non-mandatory recommendations to stay at home”) were implemented globally. People were restricted from traveling, attending social gatherings, working, going to church, etc. Many lives were lost. By March 2020, approximately 63 900 people had been infected with the virus and 6 070 lost lives were recorded in China (Kaplan, 2020).

According to the statistics for business report, 46,4% of all South African businesses had to close temporarily due to COVID-19 (STATS SA, 2020). One of the biggest hotel groups, namely The Tsogo Sun, had to close 36 hotels, which totalled 7 700 guestrooms. It was feared that the strict COVID-19 regulations could destroy the hospitality industry (Comins, 2020). On 8 September 2020, the CEO of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa, Mr Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, announced that the GDP has declined by 51% due to the COVID-19 pandemic (West, 2020; Mackenzie, 2020). However, the hospitality industry is slowly recovering. The FNB property strategist, John Loos, states that since the COVID-19 strict restrictions were withdrawn in 2021, gradual improvements with regard to tourism and travel are expected in 2022 and beyond (Writer, 2022).

2.4.2.4 Changing consumer needs and demands

Travelers are changing their approach to travel planning and restructuring some of their objectives (Baratti, 2021). Changing consumer needs include factors such as technology, which has unfortunately made guests impatient. Also, customers are more culturally focused, and the fact that more customers are now concerned with the experience rather than the brand or a well-designed hotel, forces hotels to better understand their guests (SOEG JOBS, 2022).

2.4.2.5 Energy management challenges

One of the major topics of discussion among hotel professionals is the significance of discovering economical and imaginative new solutions to reduce energy consumption (Wager, 2023). Also, the hospitality industry should note that customers are looking for green and sustainable hotels, they want to contribute positively towards the environment. Therefore, hotels must begin investing in eco-friendly and renewable energy sources (SOEG JOBS, 2022).

2.4.2.6 Shortage of trained staff

Finding the appropriate staff can be challenging, particularly for small hotels. With increased automation and expertise-based positions, finding and retaining the proper individuals in the hotel business will be difficult. As a result, it is critical for recruiters to identify trained individuals as well as understand the demands and desires of today's hospitality job seekers. Otherwise, they will experience difficulties in providing quality services (SOEG JOBS, 2022).

2.4.2.7 Ineffective marketing

According to (Bismart, 2023), traditional advertising and marketing tactics are becoming less effective, and businesses are shifting to new, more digital types of marketing. In the coming years, one of the things that will make or break firms willing to make the transition into the new era will be the creation of advanced digital marketing tactics. Khatri (2019:75) states that it is critical to include information technology (IT) into efforts to improve service quality; nevertheless, the hospitality industry appears to lag in terms of marketing tactics such as IT.

Despite the challenges encountered, the tourism industry always seems to persevere and manage to overcome challenges in the end (Pololikashvili, 2020).

2.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The hospitality industry is part of the broader tourism industry. The hospitality industry is said to be the 'umbrella term' for restaurants, hotels and recreational establishments such as theme parks, casinos and cruise lines. The main segments of the hospitality industry are hotels and restaurants (Melissen & Sauer, 2019:10-11). Skripak (2018:306-307) supports this by stating that the hospitality industry includes accommodation and food and beverage groups, and that the hospitality industry is the largest segment within the tourism industry. The hospitality industry is a huge and vital part of the global economy that employs large numbers of people (Jones & Comfort, 2020:3040). The industry is important, because it is a great income generator for an economy, it boosts job creation, and it boosts other entities (iNurture, 2016), as pointed out in section 2.4 above). Tourism is rated the top three employer in 32 states, globally. The hospitality

industry is a significant contributor to the global economy, employing millions of people all over the world. Approximately 334 million people were employed within the tourism industry globally. Over 16,9 million people employed within the hospitality industry in the United States (US) alone (1,3 million people were employed in hotels), 3,52 million people in the United Kingdom (UK), 1,06 million people in France in 2018 and 2.45 million people in German in 2020. A projection of 52.81 million jobs created in the Indian hospitality industry by 2028 is seen (Gitnux, 2023). In Europe (EU), 1,6 million jobs were created within the hospitality industry between 2013 and 2016 (Hotrec, 2023). Employment increased by an overall 14% between 2005 and 2018 (Dobrosielski, 2019). During COVID-19, employment in the tourist industry declined globally, however there is an increase that totals 295 million jobs; with growth expected to reach 320 million jobs by 2023 (Statista, 2023c).

In Table 2.1 below (STATS SA, 2023b:3), it can be seen that income generated from accommodation increased by 46,7 % from 2021 to 2023. The increase indicates the importance of the accommodation industry, specifically within hotels:

Table 2.1: STATS SA Accommodation income of quarter 4: months ended Jan 2022 and months ended Jan 2023

Accommodation Type	Nov 2021 – Jan 2022 (in R million)	Nov 2022 – Jan 2023 (in R million)	% change between Nov 2021 – Jan 2022 and Nov 2022-Jan 2023	Contribution (% points) to the total % change
Hotels	2 179,8	3 493,2	60,3	28,1
Caravan parks and camping sites	167,7	199,4	18,9	0,7
Guest-houses and guest- farms	300,2	369,7	23,2	1,5
Other accommodation	2 028,2	2 797,8	37,9	16,4
Total income from accommodation	4 675,9	6 860,1	46,7	46,7

Source: STATS SA (2023b:3)

2.5.1 The South African tourism and hospitality industry

South Africa has been awarded several achievements in the past years regarding tourism and hospitality. It was nominated as Africa's leading destination and leading tourist board of 2018 (World Travel Awards, 2021), while Cape town was nominated as Africa's leading beach destination; leading business travel destination; leading city destination; leading festival and events destination; as well as Africa's leading meeting and conference destination in 2020 (Travel Reporter, 2020). South Africa is popular for its diversity in terms of tourist places to visit. It remains one of the favourite global destinations for tourists, with the friendliest and most welcoming people (Graeff, 2020). South Africa attracted 16,44 million tourists in 2018 and an increase of up to 19,6 million was estimated by 2023 (Kamer, 2021). Stated in the South African Tourism Annual Report 2021/2022, worldwide tourism grew by 4% in 2021, with 15 million more international tourists arriving than in 2000 (South African Tourism, 2022:10). Following COVID-19, a significant drop in visits from tourists in 2020 and 2021 was seen, however, the number of tourists in South Africa is improving. The number of tourists plummeted by 72.6% from 10 228 593 in 2019 to 2 802 320 in 2020, and by 19.5% between 2020 and 2021. The number of tourists arriving increased by 152,6% from 2 255 699 in 2021 to 5 698 062 in 2022 (STATS SA, 2022:20). The number of tourist visitors increased gradually from January to December 2022, however it is still 44,3% lower than the pre-pandemic year of 2019 (STATS SA, 2023c). The total number of domestic overnight trips was 18.4 million, with 4,6 million of them being vacation excursions. Domestic vacation trips increased by 50% in 2021/2022 compared to 2020/2022 (South African Tourism, 2022:30).

According to the South African provincial tourist arrivals report, the 2019 tourist attractions and tourist spending are indicated in Table 2.2: below. However, post-COVID, overall domestic revenue was R56.3 billion in 2021/2022, with an average spend of R3 066 per tourist, a 3.2% increase over 2020/2021 (South African Tourism, 2022:30). Domestic overnight travel revenue was R14.8 million in 2021, 47.9% less than in 2019 and 12.9% less than in 2020. While International tourist arrivals in South Africa dropped from R2.8 million in 2020 to R2.3 million in 2021 (South African Tourism, 2022:13).

Table 2.2: Share and spending of tourists

Province	Share of tourists by province	Spending by tourists, by province
Western Cape	19,6%	R19bn
Free State	10,1%	R8bn
Eastern Cape	4,1%	R3bn
Gauteng	32,1%	R25bn
KwaZulu-Natal	7,8%	R5bn
Mpumalanga	16,7%	R1bn
Northern Cape	1,2%	R1bn
Northwest	6,0%	R3bn
Limpopo	21,9%	R6bn

Source: SA Tourism (2021)

In 2019, the restaurant and hotel sector employed 330 385 people, indicating that the sector alone contributed more than 3% of the 10 million people employed in the formal non-agriculture sector in South Africa (South African Market Insights, 2020).

The tourism industry is said to be the possible post-COVID-19 lifeline of the South African economy as soon as entities would be allowed to fully open for business (West, 2020). The secretary-general of UNWTO, Mr Pololikashvili, emphasised this by stating that tourism, due to its importance in job creation and as the driver of development, would in fact play a major role in the recovery from COVID-19's negative effects. The author also mentions the fact that Africa was globally affected the least, and that fact could be used by all African countries to position themselves as a safer destination (Pololikashvili, 2020).

It is encouraging that the tourism industry is resilient and has overcome disasters in the past. Therefore, with the right support, such as the "100 Million Jobs Recovery Plan" by the World Travel and Tourism Council, it will surely resuscitate and boost the economy again (ILO, 2020).

2.6 HOTELS

The hotel industry affects both the economic and employability growth within a country. An increase of 3 524 hotels was seen between the years 2010 and 2018 in the United States (Dobrosielski, 2019). In South Africa, it was estimated that hotel room availability would increase from 60 800 hotel rooms in 2014 to 63 600 hotel rooms by 2019 (PwC, 2020). This is evident as international brands such as Radisson and Hilton are indeed entering the South African hospitality market (Zietsman, 2018). According to Mordor Intelligence (2022), South Africa is comprised of approximately 192 international-brand hotels, making up a total of 24 300 guestrooms, with nearly 18 new hotels either under construction, or in the planning stages.

2.6.1 History and growth of hotels

The hospitality industry is comprised of four segments: the food and beverage sector, lodging, travel and tourism, and recreation. Hotels fall under the lodging sector, defined as temporary accommodation for a specific number of days and nights (Novak, 2017).

Hotels go back as far as the year 705 AD. This is the period the Nishiyama Onsen Keiunkan spa hotel in Japan, the world's oldest hotel, was opened (Travel News, 2022; Lake, 2021). According to The Most Famous Hotels In The World - Library of Hospitality (2023), another one of the oldest accommodation facilities, namely Les Trois Rois, was established as an Inn in Switzerland. The Inn was officially opened on the 16th of February 1844 as the grand hotel namely Les Trois Rois. Consequently, hotels evolved. In 1800, the reformation period of the hotel and lodging industry occurred. Then more modernised hotels were introduced when the first Tremont Hotel was opened in the US in 1839. It was considered the finest hotel in the Republic of Texas, hosting many social gatherings and visiting dignitaries (Rosenberg Library Museum, 2023). The Tremont included private rooms, lockable doors, a bowl, a water jug and a bar of soap for each room. In 1900, a boom of hotels was seen within the US. Unfortunately, the hotel industry then took a steep dive as many hotels were either closed or went bankrupt in 1930. However, post-World War II, the industry was revived, and it blossomed globally. That was due to the growth in population and travel interest. Hotel development was seen in India, Indonesia, Mauritius, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Australia in 1934 (Stringam & Partlow, 2015:8-9).

According to research on the history of South African hotels in Johannesburg conducted by Rogerson (2018:5), tourism was not a priority during the years between 1928 and 1963; the focus was on marketing investment. Even the American cruise passengers that were passing by from Cape Town were not interested in the city of Johannesburg, since it was remarkably similar to what they were already used to back in their country. Therefore, the tourism market depended on domestic visitors and tourists from North, Central and East Africa. The author further reports that it was only during the Second World War (1939-1945) that a growth of tourism was seen due to refugees into South Africa.

Apartheid in South Africa had a negative impact on the flow of tourists to South Africa (Van Wyk, 249-250). Following the Sharpeville shootings, the apartheid regime faced growing political isolation and significant international censure. Boycotts and sanctions campaigns against the country began (Stevens, 2016:180,185). After the declaration of a state of emergency following the Sharpeville massacre, a fresh and increased emphasis on promoting both international and domestic tourism in South Africa was launched (Van Wyk, 2013:252). However, tourism had not become a significant regulated business until the early 1960s, when the country's first Department of Tourism was established in 1963 (Van Wyk, 2013:246). The development of tourism unavoidably drew attention to the state of the country's hotel services (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022:44).

The origins of South African hotels initiated from Europe. However, as the industry grew, it developed its own warm style of hospitality. Early 1980's voluminous arrivals of professional German and Swiss hoteliers introduced the necessary standards to the South African hotels and only after 1994 and post-sanctioning, were volumes of international tourists seen. This is the period that propelled the building of five-star hotels in South Africa (South-African-Hotels.com, 2020).

2.6.2 Classification of hotels

Hotels are intricate business entities, comprised of a variety of other businesses within. These other businesses include the accommodation section, food and beverage section, retail stores, banqueting/events section, spa and more, depending on the size of the hotel (Haley, 2012:112). Hotels may be classified as follows:

- Limited-service hotels – These hotels provide clean, safe, and reasonably priced rooms that suit guests' fundamental needs. These hotels offer simple services. No restaurant or banqueting facilities are available. Rates are often exceptionally low (Setup My Hotel, 2022).
- Select-service – These establishments offer a mix of limited-service and a limited number of full-service hotel facilities. A restaurant is available, affordable, meals are offered, and accommodation is available. Majority of hotels that offer select-service fall under the three-star grade category (Landman, 2022).
- Full-service hotels – These hotels are more expensive than limited and select-service hotels. They offer more facilities, such as multiple restaurants, more variety on meals, and selective amenities such as spas, a gym, and multiple banqueting rooms (Bauer, 2014:48-49).

According to Setup My Hotel (2022), hotels may also be classified under the following seven categories:

- Location (is the hotel situated downtown, in the suburb, or at the airport, etc.).
- The number of rooms (accommodation facilities with fewer guestrooms may be categorised under small, such as motels or bed and breakfast, whereas larger establishments with above 26-100 guestrooms would be medium lodging facilities. Those of 100 to 1 000 and more guestrooms would be categorised as large or very large hotels).
- Ownership (is the establishment individually owned or is it a partnership, close cooperation, etc.).
- Pricing plan (does the hotel charge for bed and breakfast only, or is it all-inclusive (bed, breakfast, lunch, dinner, room service, etc.).
- Type of clientele (does the hotel offer its services to families or businesses).
- Length of guest stay (does the hotel have a maximum number of night and days' stay) such as transient hotels, or does the hotel allow longer or extended periods of stay as well as offer suites with extra bedrooms. A kitchenette and lounge for extended stay could be available such as in residential hotels. The hotel could also be semi-residential.
- Facilities offered (this is where hotel grading is involved, which categorises facilities available or accessible within a hotel, such as standard rooms, luxury rooms/suites, bed-and-breakfast only, or all-inclusive packages, gambling, gyms, etc. and (8) other lodging concepts (these includes

'camps' or 'caravans', etc.).

The TGCSA categorises South African-graded accommodation establishments according to size/number of guestrooms and facilities and services offered. These accommodation establishments are Backpackers and Hostels; Bed and Breakfast; Caravan and Camping; Country; House; Game Lodge; Nature Reserve; Guest House; Hotel; Lodge; MESE (Meetings, Exhibitions, and Special Events venues); Self-catering; Exclusive Use; and Shared Vacation (TGCSA, 2016c).

2.6.3 South African hotels and attractions

According to the graded establishment statistics, a total of 5 176 South African accommodation establishments were graded by 2015, 674 being graded *hotels* (TGCSA, 2016c). The tourism industry's development is boosted/assisted by the availability and type of attractive resources such as scenery, beaches, mountains, historical and ancient monuments, villages and so forth (Vehbi, 2012:99). Fortunately, South Africa is blessed with a number of these attractions. For instance, the Eastern Cape, comprised of 320 accommodation establishments, has beaches that attract 46% of domestic tourists and 36% of foreign visitors. Pre-COVID, Cape Town's tourism numbers increased from 5 364 704 (2018) to 5 468 093 (2019) (DA, 2020; Cape Town Tourism, 2019:4). A total of 5 698 062 tourist arrivals were seen after COVID-19. There were 1 837 649 tourists who flew into South Africa; 65,9% of these tourists arrived at the OR Tambo International Airport, while 32,5% landed at Cape Town International Airport. The majority of tourists that used marine ports of entry (a total of 5 607) entered through the Cape Town harbour (64,8%) (STATS SA, 2022:15). South African resident arrivals increased by 130,4% from 1 524 997 in 2021 to 3 513 638 in 2022, while foreign arrivals increased by 154,8% from 3 150 007 in 2021 to 8 026 409 in 2022 (STATS SA, 2022:20). Other places of attraction include the East London Museum, the National estuary, etc. (Hartle, 2020). South Africa is indeed "A world in one country", with amazing views, wildlife (with 300 mammal species, 860 birds and 8 000 plant species), and vibrant diverse communities. Between the nine provinces, there are more than 290 conservation parks (South African Government, 2020).

As stated, this study will focus on graded hotels in Bloemfontein, Free State. The Free State is comprised of five regions, also called district municipalities, being:

Lejweleputswa, Motheo, Xhariep, Northern Free State (Fezile Dabi) and Thabo Mofutsanyana. Bloemfontein is the dominion of the Motheo District Municipality (Motheo is a Sotho name meaning “strong base of building”), the capital city of the Free State, and South Africa’s judicial capital. Interesting tourist destinations, such as Golden Gate Highlands National Park, the Gariiep Dam, Naval Hill, the Maluti Mountains, and the Battlefield Route War Museum, can be found within the Free State (World Travel Information, n.d; Free State Info, n.d.). The Graded accommodation establishment (specifically *Hotels*) found in the Free State are indicated in Table 2.3: below.

Table 2.3: Distribution of 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in the Free State

Region/District Municipality	City and/or town	Number of hotels - Star Grading	Percentage of hotels per region
Fezile Dabi (formerly Northern Free State)	Parys	1 - ***	5%
Lejweleputswa	Bothaville	1 - ***	5%
Motheo	Bloemfontein	2 - ***** 5 - ***** 5 - ***	60%
Thabo Mofutsanyana	Bethlehem Clarens Fouriesburg	1 - *** 1 - *** 1 - ***** 1 - *****	20%
Xhariep	Gariiep Dam Riet River	1 - ***** 1 - *****	10%
Total		20	100%

Source: TGCSA (2016b)

As shown in Table 2.3: above, Bloemfontein has the most hotels in the Free State. It was therefore selected for the purpose of this study.

Bloemfontein, “the City of Roses” has a beautiful King’s Park Rose Garden blessed with 4 000 rose bushes. It is also popular for its annual Mangaung African Cultural Festival full of cultural and social events. One other tourist attraction is the National Women’s Memorial which celebrates and honour women and children who died during the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa (SA GCIS, 2016a:202-203). Bloemfontein is also home to the Supreme Court of Appeal, several top schools, as well as two top universities (SA GCIS, 2016b:160-166). Other top attractions found in Bloemfontein, include the Oliewenhuis Art Gallery, the Free State National Botanical Garden, the Naval Hill and the Franklin Nature Reserve, the Naval Hill Planetarium, and the National Museum, amongst others

(Hastings, 2019). Bloemfontein is conveniently/centrally located within the province, enabling tourists to conveniently visit all other attractions within the Free State. Bloemfontein offers several accommodation establishments, ranging from luxury hotels to camping facilities, especially since it is a central base for tourists (World Travel Information, n.d.).

2.6.4 Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA)

There are more than 10 000 accommodation establishments in SA and approximately 50% of these establishments are graded (South African Tourism, 2018:30). According to the SA Tourism report 2021/2022, the intention was to increase the number of graded SA hotels by 4707, which would boost perceptions of the country as a quality destination. Three thousand six hundred and five (3 605) establishments were successfully graded (South African Tourism, 2022:59,61). It is vital for accommodation establishments to be graded, simply to maintain high levels of quality, promote value for money and to ensure customer satisfaction. It also assists customers to identify the quality level and service level they can expect from an establishment (TGCSA, 2016e). This is where TGCSA plays a vital role. As indicated in Figure 2.1 below, a hotel rating has great positive influence on hotels to improve service quality.



Source: Adopted from Na (2010:15)

Figure 2.1: Relationship of hotel rating systems, service quality and hotel performance changes

The South African grading system/TGCSA grading criteria was established in 2002 and it has been revised since 2008 to be more detailed, more consistent, and more rigorous in terms of qualitative, quantitative, and quality standards required from hospitality and tourism establishments. The revision includes an improved TGCSA operating system.

These new revisions have been implemented as of 1 April 2019 (TGCSA, 2019:1; TGCSA, 2018). New plaques/signs were also introduced and issued to registered establishments in December 2016. The old black stars were not clearly readable to customers. These plaques consist of a serial number and a note that the plaque is the property of the TGCSA and that the TGCSA is a business unit of SA Tourism (Fin24, 2017). As this study focuses on hotels, hotel grading criteria will be elaborated upon in the next section.

2.6.4.1 Hotel grading criteria

Hotel accommodation, according to TGCSA (2019:4,7), must be a minimum 10-room establishment that provides limited to full services. Also, the accommodation establishment must have a reception and a dining facility. The hotel accommodation differs in size which include small hotels, large hotels, apartment hotels and boutique hotels. In addition, hotels must have an on-site representative, contactable 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, daily servicing of rooms, and en-suite bathrooms, as well as meals and beverages provided, where it is relevant. A guesthouse accommodation must provide breakfast and public areas specifically for guests.

For larger hotels (with a minimum of 80 guestrooms) to be graded, they must comply with several applications. For instance, the *exterior* of the hotel accommodation must comprise four areas (building; grounds and gardens; parking/driveway/signage; safety and security) and the *bedrooms* must comprise the following 13 areas or requirements (bedroom entrance, safety and security; beds, bases and mattress; linen and bedding; furniture; hanging space, shelves and luggage storage; flooring, ceiling, skirting and cornices; curtains and window coverings; temperature control and ventilation; lighting, power and switches; mirrors and mirror lighting; electronic appliances; accessories and hospitality stations; spaciousness and overall impressions (TGCSA, 2019:89). Whether the hotel qualifies as a 1-, 2-, 3-, 4- or 5-star establishment, will depend on what the above areas entail. Guesthouses have different qualifying requirements/complying applications. Table 2.4: below is an example pertaining to the bedrooms of a hotel.

Table 2.4: Requirements per application to qualify as a 1-, 2-, 3-, 4- or 5-star-graded hotel

Bedrooms					
Bedroom Entrance, Safety and Security	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars
Each guestroom must have instructions on how to contact help and evacuate in case of an emergency.	x	x	x	x	x
Emergency lighting available for each guestroom, e.g., torch, solar lights, etc.	x	x	x	x	x
All bedroom doors must be lockable both from inside and outside the room.	x	x	x	x	x
Secondary guest-controlled internal door lock, without staff override			x	x	x
Bedrooms with direct exterior access to a garden, road, etc. should have a secondary security device like a bolt lock.	x	x	x	x	x
Peephole facility in bedroom doors			x	x	x
Safety deposit facility available on request	x	x			
In-room safe (appropriate to the market)			x	x	x

Source: TGCSA (2019:8-15)

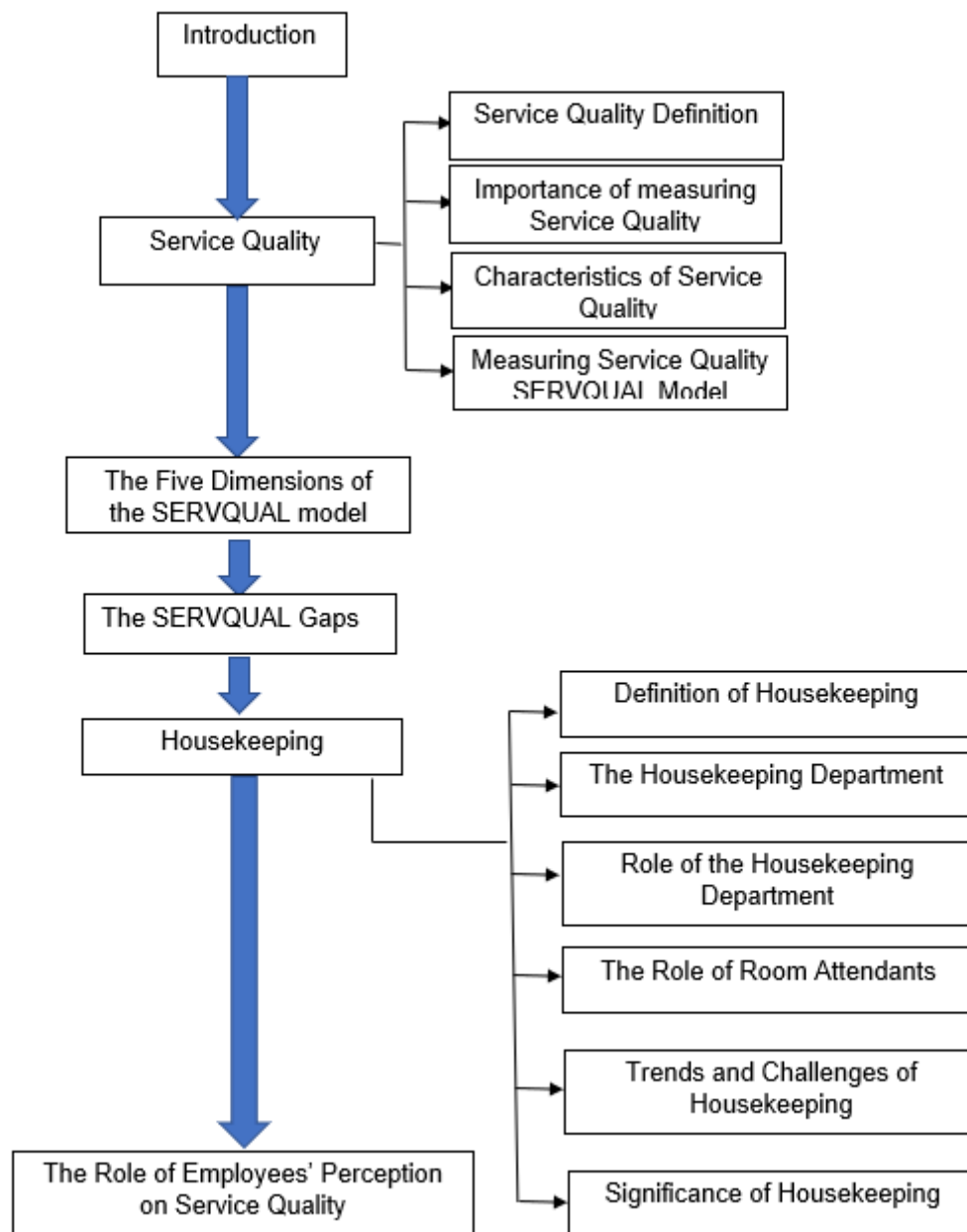
As stated in Chapter 1, this study will focus only on three-, four- and five-star hotels.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the tourism industry and the housekeeping department. An understanding of where the hospitality industry stems from and when it was established, as well as the real challenges pertaining to the industry, was also provided. The chapter also explained the origination of hotels and the grading system of South African hotels.

CHAPTER 3: SERVICE QUALITY AND THE HOUSEKEEPING DEPARTMENT

3.1 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER



3.2 INTRODUCTION

Service quality is vital for the success of a business within the hospitality industry; hence the assessment thereof is deemed as crucial. The constant change of guest demands, and the complex nature of the hospitality industry are great challenges in ensuring

quality assurance within the industry (Babić-Hodović, Arslanagić-Kalajdžić & Banda, 2015:6-7). Service quality is vital, as it contributes to gaining the loyalty of customers (Jemaiyo, Mwaura & Kamau, 2019:332). The greater the level of service quality, the greater the satisfaction of customers. Therefore, service quality affects customer satisfaction directly (Shah, Sanghvi & Brahmhatt, 2017:45). A study conducted in Taiwan city-centre hotels revealed that housekeeping services were some of the top vital techniques in service quality to enhance customer satisfaction (Kuo, Chen & Boger, 2016:767). This chapter will discuss service quality, the SERVQUAL model and its dimensions, as well as the housekeeping department and its key players.

3.3 SERVICE QUALITY

3.3.1 Definition of service quality

Tamilselvi (2016:29) defines *service* as an intangible offer between two parties for the exchange of money for pleasure *and quality* as a connection to the value of an offer that may or may not satisfy projected needs; therefore, denoting *quality service* as the good or bad way service is offered to customers.

Quality, according to Kenyon and Sen (2015:1-2), is the perceived *value* (customers' evaluation regarding the worth of a product or service) in the essential characteristics of a product or service. It is the ability of a product/service to have above-average consumer expectations. It does not mean 'expensive'. *Value* is the balance between the service benefits and associated costs (price, time, convenience, etc.) experienced by the customer in using the service.

Ramya et al. (2019:38) define *service quality* as the capability to achieve customer satisfaction efficiently to improve the performance of the service industry. Spacey (2017) describes *service quality* as the value of service offered to a customer, which is determined by the need, expectations and perceptions of customers. The author further states that these expectations and perceptions of customers are best sourced through quantified surveys. Jemaiyo et al. (2019:325) summarise *service quality* as the "weighing of the process of offering service".

3.3.2 The importance of measuring service quality

Service quality plays a critical part within service industries, as it is one of the determinants of an establishment's reputation (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017:2) and whether the establishment will survive or not (Poor et al., 2013:34). According to Kurtulmuşoğlu and Pakdil (2017:1393), service quality within hotels must be managed constantly. The authors further state that service strategies must not only focus on customer needs and expectations, but also on personnel's understanding and/or involvement. Service quality leads to customer satisfaction which ensures customer loyalty (Jemaiyo et al., 2019:325). However, biased view by employees and managers leads to service quality failures, since they sometimes pretend that the service they perform is better than the actual service performed (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015:140). To survive in a competitive service industry, establishments must strive for continuous delivery of exceptional quality service (Qualtrics, 2020), but it is a great challenge for service providers to measure service quality due to its intangible nature. Also, the fact that judgement of the quality of service is subjective to the customers makes the measuring thereof difficult. Therefore, a constructive approach is required to measure the quality of service unbiasedly (Johnson, Tsiros & Lancioni, 1995:6; Stejerean, 2016; Satpathy, Patnaik & Kumar, 2017:75).

3.3.3 Characteristics of service quality

The characteristics of service are indicated as (1) intangibility, (2) heterogeneity, (3) inseparability, and (4) perishability (Babić-Hodović et al., 2015:6).

1. Intangibility – The service cannot be physically touched or seen like physical products. This makes it difficult for customers to make a choice, as service cannot easily be judged by price, shape, size, colour, etc. (Babić-Hodović et al., 2015:6).
2. Heterogeneity – Unlike a physical product that can be consistent in quality or size every time, service is prone to service heterogeneity. For example, a waiter may not service a guest in the same manner as the previous guests. It means the dissimilarity of the quality-of-service delivery (Babić-Hodović et al., 2015:6; Merriam-Webster, 2021).

3. Inseparability – Manufacture date and consumption dates are inseparable; both production and consumption occur simultaneously where a service is involved. This means that a service cannot be produced, have an expiry date, and be kept for a customer (Babić-Hodović et al., 2015:6).
4. Perishability – Service cannot be manufactured and then warehoused or stored. Once the service is offered, it must be consumed, otherwise, it perishes (Babić-Hodović et al., 2015:6; Satpathy et al., 2017:74).

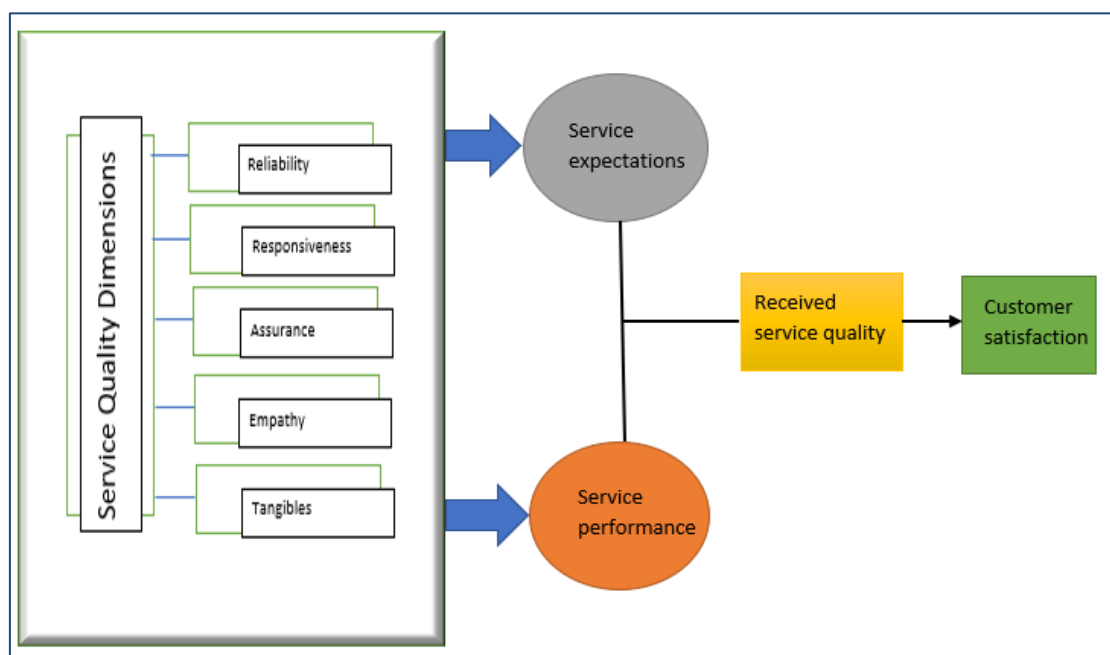
3.3.4 Measuring service quality – SERVQUAL model

As revealed in section 1.7.1, many different service quality measuring tools or models have been developed and used within the service industry over the years. Nevertheless, the SERVQUAL model is the most popular model applicable to service quality measuring in the tourism and hospitality industry; also a prime measure of employees' perception of service quality. SERVQUAL is best used as a way of measuring the quality of a service, as opposed to a tangible product. This measuring tool utilizes five dimensions that explain the consumers' experience to discover perceptions of performance and expectation (Kleynhans & Zhou, 2014:39; Colby, 2015; Mulder, 2018).

SERVQUAL was developed by Parasuraman et al. 1985. This multiple-item instrument, SERVQUAL, measuring service quality, was initially comprised of ten elements/dimensions and 97 items (therefore approximately 10 items were allocated per element). These 97 items were then rearranged into two statements to (1) measure people's expectations of an organisation and (2) measure people's perception of an organisation. These statement pairs were measured using a seven-point linked scale from 1 (strongly disagree; 2 to 6 – with no verbal labeling) to 7 (strongly agree). It is also worth noting that half of these statements were worded positively, and the other half negatively. The SERVQUAL model items went through further refinement until only 22 items and five dimensions were left (Parasuraman et al., 1988:17; Fick & Ritchie, 1991:3). The SERVQUAL model is also comprised of a series of gaps that can delay or hinder the delivery of quality services to customers. These five dimensions and gaps are discussed further in the sections below.

3.4 THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE SERVQUAL MODEL

Literature speaks of various dimensions of service quality. Some of the dimensions proposed by different authors include *physical facilities* (processes and procedures), *personal behaviour* on the part of service staff, and *materials* or *professional judgement* on the part of serving staff to get good quality service (Tamilselvi, 2016:29). Al-Ababneh (2017:1) states that other authors have argued that service quality has a different set of only three dimensions, namely *functional quality*, *environment* and *technical quality*, while other authors confirm the five dimensions, namely *assurance*, *empathy*, *reliability*, *responsiveness* and *tangibility of the SERVQUAL model*. It is to be noted that the initial dimensions of SERVQUAL were *access*, *communication*, *competence*, *courtesy*, *credibility*, *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *security*, *tangibles* and *understanding/knowing the customer*. These 10 dimensions were reduced to five in 1988, as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. *Assurance* became a combination of *communication*, *credibility*, *security*, *competence* and *courtesy*, and *empathy* became the combination of *understanding* and *access* (Kleynhans & Zhou, 2012:39; Saleh & Ryan, 1991:325-326).



Source: Adapted from Kobiruzzaman (2020)

Figure 3.1: The Service Quality Dimensions

Reliability suggests consistency and accuracy of performance as promised. This is a vital component in how customers perceive service quality, as well as their loyalty. This

includes consistency, attitude towards guest complaints and ensuring customers are always informed (El Saghier, 2015:57; Ramya et al., 2019:40).

Responsiveness is the willingness to offer help and provide prompt service to customers. An example in a hotel would be how long the guest must wait before being acknowledged and checked into a room, or how long the hotel takes to solve an issue or complaint. Therefore, regular improvements in service delivery processes and on enhanced approaches to dealing with guest complaints are essential (Ramya et al., 2019:40; Kobiruzzaman, 2020).

Assurance is defined as knowledge of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. The dimension focuses on job skill, accuracy and courtesy. Assurance is a combination of competence, courtesy, credibility and security. Being polite and respectfully serving customers is an example of assurance (Ramya et al., 2019:40; Kobiruzzaman, 2020).

Empathy refers to caring and giving individualised attention to customers by employees. The focus is on guests feeling special to the hotel. This may be accomplished by ensuring a variety in services (individual and specialised services) that appeal or satisfy different types of individuals (Ramya et al., 2019:40; Kobiruzzaman, 2020).

Tangibility refers to the physical facilities (such as equipment, personnel, and communication tools) and representation of service. Tangibility also includes technology. It improves the image of the business (Kobiruzzaman, 2020).

The formula (Robinson, 1999:4) used to calculate the average score of each dimension of service quality dimensions, of all respondents, is as follows:

$$SQ_j = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_j} p_{ij} - E_{ij}}{n_j}$$

SQ_j – Service quality of dimension j
 E_{ij} – Expectations of the firm for item I in dimension j
 P_{ij} – Perceived performance of the firm on item i in dimension j
 n_j – Number of items in dimension j
NB Positive score= exceeds expected service
 Negative score=indicate poor service
 Zero score=indicates acceptable service

It should be noted that service quality and customer satisfaction are interrelated, and that the enhancement of these service quality dimensions can improve customer satisfaction significantly (Akpojaro, n.d.:19-20). According to Williams and Buswell, (2003:66), customer dissatisfaction may arise from a lack of research on customer needs and wants; inaccurate information to guests and building high expectations that cannot be met; lack of employee training; and financial objectives surpassing customer satisfaction aspirations. The gaps discussed below can assist in identifying broken service delivery to combat guest dissatisfaction. The fact is that the management of service quality requires comprehensive research at various levels of customer-determined processes (Klimecka-Tatar & Ingaldi, 2020:766).

3.5 THE SERVQUAL GAPS

The SERVQUAL model includes five gaps arising in the service delivery process. These gaps are the groundwork of SERVQUAL. According to Grigoroudis and Siskos (2010:65), Gaps 1–4 describe the way service is delivered, while Gap 5 concerns itself with customers. The authors further mention that to resolve Gap 5, Gaps 1, 2, 3 and 4 must be resolved first.

Gap 1: Management may not always understand what indicates high quality to consumers in advance. Lack of clear understanding as to what matters to the customer is the cause of low customer service. For instance, hotels usually request that customers

confirm their booking by providing them with a credit card; therefore, credit card security assurance might indicate high quality to customers, as they might have worries about the possibility that unauthorised persons might get hold of their credit card or credit card details, and unlawfully use it. However, to management, it might not connote high quality.

Gap 2: Management might have constraints that prevent them from delivering service as customers expect it to be delivered. This relates to poor standards set or the absence of goals. Set standards should be based on important customer requirements as measured by these customers or as per the customer's point of view. For instance, a Housekeeping Manager may inform room attendants to clean the guests' rooms quickly but fail to specify how quickly the task must be done.

Gap 3: Rules, regulations, and guidelines may be available within an establishment; however, some employees are likely not to abide by them, due to variability in employee performance. A gap exists between service quality specifications and service delivery. For example, the housekeeping department may have specific standards of cleaning, while room attendants are not given proper instructions on how to follow these standards.

Gap 4: What the establishment promises to customers in advertisements, on social media, or what is displayed on their Instagram profile regarding services offered, must not be above what the establishment can offer to the customers. A hotel that claims to offer full sea-view rooms but has small windows with only a glimpse of the sea, is a mismatch to customers' expectations. This will affect customer service negatively.

Gap 5: This refers to the overall mismatch between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered. If customer expectations are higher and perceived service quality is lower than expected, it will result in customers being dissatisfied with the service received. However, if the perceived service is higher or equivalent to customer expectations, customers will be satisfied (Parasuraman et al., 1985:44-46; Kibret & Dinber, 2016:55; Shahin, 2004:123, Lapaas Digital Marketing Agency, 2019).

Table 3.1 below provides a brief description of the SERVQUAL gaps and possible initiators.

Table 3.1: Summary and causes of SERVQUAL GAPS

GAP	Description	Cause
GAP 1 The break/breach between consumers expectation and management perception	Management cannot correctly identify what the guest wants	Deficiency in proper marketing research, poor understanding of customer expectations, Insufficient focus on demand quality and too much red tape between top management and frontline staff
GAP 2 The breach between management perception and service quality specification	Management can correctly identify what the guest wants, however, performance standards are not set	Inadequate planning processes, lack of management role models, unclear and misunderstood service designs, and new service development processes that are unorganised
GAP 3 Breach between service quality specifications and service delivery	This gap is caused due to personnel/employees	Lack of proper human resource (HR) policies, ineffective internal marketing, demand and supply mismatch, lack of training
GAP 4 Gap between service delivery and external communication	Customer expectations vastly influenced by company marketing such as advertisements, pamphlets, etc.	False marketing/over-promises, mismanagement/follow-up of customer expectations and underperforming
GAP 5 Gap between expected service and actual experienced service	Customer misinterprets the service quality	Causes of GAP1 to GAP 4

Source: Sharma (2014:480-481); Grigoroudis & Siskos (2010:67)

The GAPS explained above highlight the importance of communication between service providers and customers. For instance, the service provider may understand the customer's expectations, but fail to translate these expectations into adequate service quality specifications. The service quality specifications set by the establishment may

also not be delivered properly (Stejerean, 2016). Therefore, mismatched communication between the service provider and the customer must be resolved diligently.

Based on the explanations above, the application and evaluation of the SERVQUAL GAPS in this study will contribute toward attaining the aim of the study. This will assist the management of the relevant hotels, including all other comparable hotels to pinpoint the existence of current service quality issues and, more importantly, how to close the gaps (Urban, 2009:643).

3.6 HOUSEKEEPING

According to Hoteltalk (2019) and Rutherford and O'Fallon (2007:77-78), there are 10 main departments that may be found within a hotel. These departments are Front Office, Finance/Accounts, Food and Beverage Service, Food and Beverage Production, Security, Engineering and Maintenance, Human Resources (HR), Sales and Marketing, Purchase and Store, and last and most important, the housekeeping department, which is the department examined for this study. The Front office, Housekeeping, Engineering and Maintenance may be grouped under Rooms Department or Rooms Division.

The housekeeping department is one of the most important departments responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the perishable goods responsible for a minimum of 50% of a hotel's revenue (Singh & Amandeep, 2017:310). It is the main department that is linked directly or indirectly to all other departments in a hotel; hence, it must always maintain good relations with these departments. It should have good cooperation with the front office in particular. Housekeeping ensures that the rooms to be sold by the front office are as per the required standards (BNG Hotel Management, 2020).

Figure 3.2 below illustrates all other departments that must liaise with the housekeeping department.



Source: Adopted from BNG Hotel Management (2020)

Figure 3.2: Housekeeping Department – the centre of all other hotel departments

3.6.1 Definition of housekeeping in an accommodation establishment

Roberts (2016) defines housekeeping as the delivery of a clean, comfortable and safe environment. However, housekeeping should not only be limited to the housekeeping department, but every staff member or departmental manager such as the chef, the restaurant manager including the general manager in a hotel, must ensure the cleanliness, comfort, and safety of their areas. It is a “24 x 7 x 365 operation” (Roberts, 2016). Housekeeping is also defined as the management and upkeep of the property and equipment of an establishment. It is a vital department that requires staff with an eye for detail and staff that is committed to self-development. Additionally, the housekeeping department’s provision of exceptional service and cleanliness can differentiate a hotel from its competitors and be a determinant whether its guests will return or not (Singh, 2012:19-20).

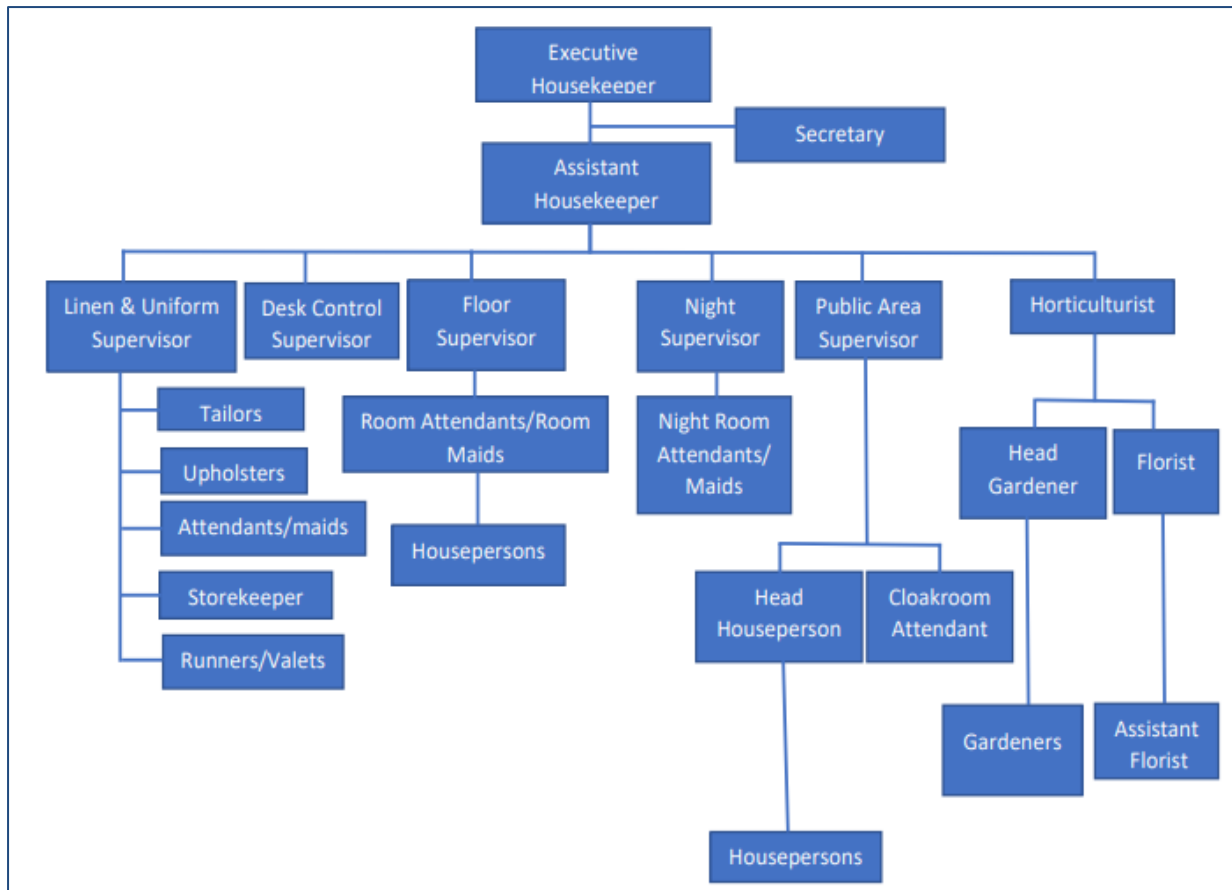
3.6.2 The housekeeping department

The housekeeping (HK) department often falls under the accommodation division of a hotel. The accommodation division is comprised of sections such as the housekeeping

department, the front office, engineering, laundry, health club recreation and the business centre, all of which contribute towards the sale of rooms. The HK department is usually comprised of the majority of all employees of an entire hotel (Andrews, 2013:29, 53). It is factually responsible for the cleanliness and maintenance of the whole hotel. It is to be observed that the sale of rooms represents 65% of the overall sales of all income-generating areas of the hotel, such as food and beverage sales, laundry services, etc. Hence it is often described as the “backbone of the hotel”, now referred to as “the heart of the hotel” (Raghubalan & Raghubalan, 2015:17).

Vital factors to consider when planning the layout of the housekeeping department is its functionality and the size of the hotel. The department must accommodate the large quantity of linen from each guestroom, equipment required, staff and additional services to guests such as laundry services. Other factors to consider include accessibility to room attendants, location and floor level and the maximum occupancy of the hotel (Setup My Hotel, 2022).

Figure 3.3 below depicts an organisational chart of a 5-star hotel. Lines of authority are indicated; the executive housekeeper is the leader of the housekeeping department. Supervisors and their subordinates are also available for other sections such as the laundry area, the public area, the horticulture/garden, etc. The chart may differ, depending on the size of the hotel.



Source: Adopted from Raghubalan & Raghubalan (2015:23); Setup My Hotel (2022)

Figure 3.3: Sample housekeeping organisational structure of a 5-star hotel

3.6.3 The role of the housekeeping department:

Farnen (2018) and Roberts (2016) list the role of the housekeeping department as follows:

- To achieve the maximum possible efficiency in ensuring the care and comfort of guests, as well as ensuring the smooth running of the department.
- To create a friendly environment and guarantee polite, dependable service from department employees.
- To ensure a high standard of cleanliness in all areas that are within the department's responsibility.
- Provision and inventory maintenance of linen within areas of the department's responsibilities.

- Provision of uniforms for all the staff.
- To launder the hotel linen, staff uniforms and guest clothing.
- To provide and maintain the aesthetics (internal and external) of the hotel.
- To coordinate renovation and refurnishing of the hotel with interior designers.
- To manage lost and found articles.
- To warrant staff training and supervision.
- To establish good interdepartmental working relationship.
- To ensure staff awareness of safety and security regulations within the department.

The housekeeping department must also work together with the engineering and maintenance area, to fix broken items such as televisions, remote controls, side-lamps, etc. Restocking of minibar items can be the responsibility of the housekeeping in other hotels (Hotel Tech Report, 2022). The housekeeping department must also ensure sound budget control and housekeeping-related forecasting (Setup My Hotel, 2022). Most importantly, as other hotels are currently striving to ensure, housekeeping staff should be encouraged to interact more with guests to better understand their needs and achieve great customer satisfaction (Singh & Amandeep, 2017:310).

3.6.4 The role of room attendants in the housekeeping department

The role of the room attendant is to ensure the cleanliness, hygienics and comfort of guestrooms. Room attendants must also ensure that they are in possession of all supplies, equipment, and linen to ensure service is conducted successfully (Boshoff, 2015:27). Duties of a room attendant include vacuuming of the guestroom and corridor carpets, cleaning of public areas, emptying guestroom, and restroom bins, changing of the sheets, making the beds, replenishing guest supplies (soap, lotions, toilet paper), dusting and polishing of furniture (Farnen, 2018). There is no need to spend lots of money within a housekeeping department to reach the required standards; however, ensuring the correct processes/practices within the housekeeping department will ensure high standards of operation (Lodging Staff, 2018). Room attendants have high access to the personal space and belongings of guests; therefore, safekeeping and

being trustworthy are vital parts of the room attendant's role. In addition, room attendants must be informed about the hotel as a whole, to ensure that they give the correct information to guests should they make any inquiries, and also to avoid customer dissatisfaction (Andrews, 2008:265).

The researcher deems that room attendants and other employees within the department are vital in the contribution to great quality service and the maintaining thereof. Therefore, the role of employees' perception of service quality and the reasons why employee perceptions need to be monitored will be elaborated upon in section 3.7.

3.6.5 Trends and challenges of housekeeping

In the past, housekeeping used to be back-of-house. However, today reputable hospitality chains have opted to change housekeeping to front-of-house and encourage more guest interaction. Unfortunately, this adds to challenges already faced by housekeeping in terms of difficulty in interacting with well-travelled and knowledgeable guests. Housekeeping also faces challenges of remaining consistent due to high staff turnover, adopting modern technologies and trends, as well as keeping staff motivated in a highly physically demanding job (Goswami, 2013). Karthik (2015:4170-4172) indicates that hotel housekeeping is not only about cleaning; it has evolved and requires of staff to be more professional and knowledgeable about new trends such as eco practices – being environmentally responsible and “go green”. Housekeeping staff are required to produce energy-conserving ideas and be IT savvy – being technologically advanced in utilizing IT devices such as WIFI, voice over internet protocol/VOIP, etc. The author further emphasises the challenges of proper training, outsourcing of specialised housekeeping work as a cost-effective business strategy, safety, and security – being knowledgeable regarding ergonomics (the study of housekeeping attendants' body movements and the impact thereof), as well as the retention of housekeeping employees. The author recommends the above be given extensive attention to contribute towards a successful housekeeping department.

The monotonous nature of housekeeping usually and unfortunately leads to fatigue and a lower sense of achievement. The job requires long hours of work in large numbers of guestrooms, challenged by the lack of proper communication between room attendants and supervisors, difficulties in balancing work and family life, as well as the pressure to

keep up with the star/criteria ratings (Chun-Fang & Bang-Zhi, 2017:368, 376). Hence, stated by a room attendant in an article by Menlyk (2017), as “one of the most demanding, physical job in an entire hotel”.

According to Yilmaz (2017:450-451), housekeeping work unfortunately remains invisible to hospitality graduates, researchers, guests, and other hotel employees. The reason graduates are not aware of the job opportunities in the housekeeping department is that a housekeeping job is not recommended by parents of students. Unfortunately, it has always been seen as a ‘dirty’ or a low-standard job. The work is usually conducted in the absence of guests; therefore, guests do not see the effort that goes into the job.

3.6.6 Significance of housekeeping

Even though housekeeping may be considered a dull profession, it is in fact one of the most important departments within hospitality establishments. Depending on the size of a hotel, managerial duties such as scheduling workers, setting housekeeping policies, training room attendants, stock purchasing, etc., may be divided among first-line managers/supervisors and high-level managers. These managers would require some form of skills (supervision, procurement, budgeting, and/or problem-solving skills), whereas entry-level room attendants do not require any skills (Farnen, 2018). According to Davies (2018), housekeeping is the most important aspect of a hotel for the following reasons:

- Hotel hygiene is a top priority for customers;
- A negative review regarding hotel hygiene can cost a hotel to lose up to 30 possible bookings;
- Cleanliness is an important influence when booking accommodation;
- Good housekeeping has a positive impact on guest satisfaction;
- International guests rank cleanliness – it is particularly important to European and American guests; they rank housekeeping and cleanliness, other facilities and/or services within a hotel such as furniture comfort, customer service, internet access; and
- “Hotels’ cleanliness sets the tone for quality, and it pays to invest in building a

superior housekeeping department” (Davies, 2018).

Therefore, the service standards of a hotel are a great influence on whether customers will stay in a country or not, and the housekeeping management of the hotel determines the service to be provided to its customers (Tuzon-Guarin, 2016:97). The main key players within the housekeeping departments are the ‘cleaners’, professionally known as room attendants, as discussed in section 3.6.4 above.

3.7 THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEES’ PERCEPTION OF SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality is crucial within the hospitality industry as it has the power to keep an organisation competitive. However, there is unfortunately a lack of understanding regarding the perception of service quality between a hotel and its customers (Kim-Soon, Rahman & Visvalingam, 2014:37). Employees are the most easily accessible people within an organisation that may contribute valuable information and feedback pertaining to strategic plans, which influence customer satisfaction (Shahani-Denning, 2001:293). Hence, it is crucial to determine the perceptions of employees regarding service quality. Employees with a higher level of service quality perception than customers pose a problem. If employees believe the quality of services they deliver is better than customers’ perceptions, that may prevent these employees from meeting customer expectations or rendering improved quality service (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015:133-134). Additionally, employees’ personality in involvement with customers is highly influential in business transactions, particularly quality-of-service delivery (Teng, Huang & Tsai, 2007:849-850). As service quality is one of the vital aspects of customer satisfaction, it is of the utmost importance for employees to clearly understand what service quality entails. Employees have an excessive influence on customer satisfaction and should therefore be part of the enhancement processes of service quality of a company (Pirnar et al., 2010:396-398).

According to a study conducted by Lee et al. (2017:168; 171-172), some employees can deliver more than acceptable quality service, while others cannot (heterogeneity). Heterogeneity, or a variation in the delivery of quality service, can affect customer satisfaction and should therefore be minimized. These authors hypothesize that job tenure (job experience), expertise (level of education) and service efficacy (workload), are related negatively to the variation in service quality. Results indicate a high

correlation of job tenure being related negatively to service quality variation in all dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. That means that employees with a high level of job tenure, including expertise (skill and knowledgeable), can deliver consistent, high-quality service. Also, control over practice could affect the impact of job tenure on variation in service quality negatively and interrelate with expertise in minimizing heterogeneity.

This study will be vital in identifying these employee perceptions within housekeeping departments of the relevant hotels and assist in contributing towards improved service quality delivery. The subsequent chapter will elaborate on the exact procedures followed in achieving the goal of this study.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter's goal was to elucidate the housekeeping department, together with its key players; also, to define service quality and describe its influence within the service industry, especially with reference to the housekeeping department of a hotel. The measuring of service quality to mitigate poor service quality deliverance was also discussed. Finally, the chapter outlined why employee perceptions are vital in contributing to improving service quality delivery. Employees' significance cannot be underestimated.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the methodology adopted for this study. Research methodology is the overall tactics conducted in a research study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:32). The research methodology tactics, which include research approach and design, research strategy applied, the population sample, data-collection measures, and data analysis are discussed in this chapter.

It is to be noted that research methodology must be pertinent to three vital aspects, being the study's discipline, research questions, and the type of data to be collected to reach results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:107). These aspects will be elaborated upon, as well as the data collection instrument to utilised. The chapter will also elucidate the methods followed to ensure the quality of this study.

The following section gives the expected outcomes of the study and indicates the methodology followed.

4.2 EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY

The objectives below are borne from the problem statement of this study:

4.2.1 Primary objective

To identify employee perceptions of service quality and associated challenges faced within the housekeeping departments of 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded Bloemfontein hotels.

4.2.2 Secondary objectives

The objectives below were coined to accomplish the main or primary objective of this study for 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein:

- Determine service quality dimensions perceived to be vital by the housekeeping employees of 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels.
- Determine the differences in housekeeping management perceptions and housekeeping employees' perceptions on service quality.

- Identify the main challenges faced by housekeeping employees, based on their perceptions and expectations of service quality.
- Identify how perceived housekeeping challenges affect service quality.
- Propose specific recommendations to contribute towards improving the service quality of housekeeping departments of the 3-, 4-, and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The research design of a study should be explained briefly and clearly (Maree, 2016:36). According to Ackoff (cited by Kothari, 2004:31), a research design is an arrangement of parameters for data collecting and analysis that seeks to balance procedural economy with relevance to the study purpose. The author further adds that it addresses questions such as what the study is about; why the study is conducted; where the study will be conducted; what types of data are required; what the sample design will be; which techniques of data collection will be used; how the data will be analysed; and in what style the report will be prepared. Research may be approached in three different ways, namely quantitative method, qualitative method, and mixed method (combination of quantitative and qualitative methods). The use of the quantitative method allows the researcher to establish relationships between assessed variables (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:19-20). Also, quantified information is better suited to hospitality and tourism research to reach extensive findings (Ezeuduji, 2013:4), and the captured data thereof can be analysed easily (Brunt, Horner & Semley, 2017:28).

A questionnaire survey is the most prevalent methodology used in the tourism, hospitality and events-based research. This is due to its ability to gather a large number of respondents fast and cost effectively, while interview biasness is avoided (Brunt et al., 2017:31-32). Therefore, it seemed fitting to adopt a survey design (quantitative by nature) for this study.

4.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY

To avoid time- and resource-consuming trials in research, one must have a research strategy. This will assist in research with good direction and attempts in attaining an overall valuable study (Dinnen, 2014). A research strategy is a guide that entails detailed research methods on how to collect and analyse data. It should be appropriate for the research question, feasible and ethical (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014:39). This study is quantitative by nature. The SERVQUAL model was utilised to measure the perceptions of participants about service quality. This strategy assists in describing attributes of the SERVQUAL model and the importance to customers within hotels. A self-administered questionnaire, derived from the SERVQUAL model, was used to measure expectations and perceptions of the participating housekeeping employees. The analysis of the collected data, including detailed information regarding the data collection tool and procedure, is discussed under the sections to follow.

4.5 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING

According to Van Zyl, Salkind and Green (2014:95) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014:143), a population is the total number of a particular group/criteria from which results can be generalised. A sample is the selected group of people from the total population, from whom data are collected. The population is the employees of the 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein. There is a total of 12 graded and hotel-classified accommodation establishments in Bloemfontein (TGCSA, 2016c). A total or complete/whole-frame population sampling was implemented for this study. However, out of the 12 hotels, one hotel had to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic; three hotels stated that they were not interested in being part of the study; and one hotel outsourced their housekeeping. In addition, most of the hotels were forced to reduce their housekeeping room attendants' numbers due to COVID-19.

Table 4.1 below indicates that all participating hotels have a housekeeping department. The total expected numbers of participants per hotel, including the actual number of participants, are shown in Chapter 5.

Table 4.1: Participating Bloemfontein hotels and whether they have a housekeeping department.

Hotel	TGCSA Grading	Housekeeping Department
Bloem Hotel Conference and Spa	3 starred	Yes
BON Hotel Bloemfontein Central	3 starred	Yes
City Lodge Bloemfontein	3 starred	Yes
Premier Hotel Splendid Inn Bloemfontein	3 starred	Yes
Protea Hotel by Marriott Bloemfontein	4 starred	Yes
Protea Hotel by Marriott Bloemfontein Willow Lake	4 starred	Yes

4.6 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

There are several ways to gather data. This includes group administration of questionnaires, postal survey, telephone, and face-to-face interviews. As mentioned above in section 4.4, this study employed the administration of questionnaires as it is an inexpensive method that can cover many respondents in a brief period. The other reason for selecting the use of this form of collection was that the researcher could be available on site to clarify any questions the respondents might have (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:176).

Twelve hotels met the required criterion to participate in the study, while six of these hotels agreed to participate in the study. This was accomplished by contacting the general managers of each hotel via e-mail, telephone, and personal visits with detailed information regarding the study. Permission was granted by the general managers of the six hotels. The researcher visited the hotels for distribution of the questionnaires and the collection thereof. The questionnaires were completed voluntarily and anonymously by all the relevant hotels' housekeeping department employees, who agreed to participate in the study.

4.6.1 Data collection instrument

As suggested by Punch and Oancea (2014:293), the following important steps were considered when the data collection instrument was constructed; what is it that the researcher was measuring, the Likert scale, the number of questions respondents can manage, and the self-explanatory level of each question. The self-explanatory level of questions may be revealed by the administration of a pre-test and a remodification of the evaluated instrument.

A self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix B), consisting of two sections, was used to gather data for this study. Section one assembled demographic information of the employees such as gender, age, position and practical work experience in the hospitality industry. Section two aimed to measure the employees' perceptions of service quality using the SERVQUAL model (space for any comments was availed for respondents to write in). The questions were based on the 22 original statements as per five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model; however, modified and reduced to fit the study. Over the years, researchers have developed several service quality measuring tools and even improved on existing ones; however, SERVQUAL remains the prevailing model of measuring service quality (Sharma, 2014:480); hence, it was used in this study.

The researcher initially sought to use the Likert scale of 1 to 5; 1 being 'strongly disagree', 2 for 'disagree', 3 for 'neutral', 4 for 'agree' and 5 being 'strongly agree'. However, a Likert scale of 1 to 4 was decided upon by the researcher. According to Nemoto and Beglar (2014:5), the neutral category on the Likert scale is unnecessary and causes statistical issues. The author also mentioned that the Likert scale should be intellectualised as physical measuring tools such as a ruler, which has no neutral length or a "no-length" category. In addition, a 4-point Likert scale is best for obtaining opinions on service or products, as it forces a person to answer all questions, instead of escaping to the neutral category option (Formplus Blog, 2004).

The self-administered questionnaires (see Appendix B) were hand delivered by the researcher to the relevant managers of each participating hotel. The researcher availed herself of this and remained at the hotel to explain the questionnaire completion process. However, some hotels would not allow the researcher to meet with their staff

members due to COVID-19 protocols. Therefore, the researcher made a video clip that explained the questionnaire completion process to some of the executive housekeepers. Other hotels preferred that the questionnaires be delivered and collected from the housekeeping supervisor, at a convenient time to the hotel, especially during busy periods.

4.6.2 Pilot study

A pilot study is explained as a pre-test of the research instrument that assists in ensuring that the compiled questions and the wording thereof will be understood by participants (Kumar, 2011:158-159). The author further elaborates that this pre-test, which is not for data collection purposes, must be conducted under actual conditions, with similar participants of this study. A pilot study can reveal whether the participants can complete the questionnaire, whether there are necessary adjustments required and how long it will take the respondent to complete (Fouché et al., 2021:221).

Therefore, a pilot study was undertaken at Lion Lodge, which is a four-star-graded accommodation establishment in Bloemfontein. Permission to gather data for this purpose was requested beforehand in writing. The accommodation establishment was selected because it is similar to the population of the study. Lion Lodge is an accommodation establishment, comprised of 18 guestrooms and offers dining facilities where breakfast, lunch and dinner are served. A total of six questionnaires were gathered. This was conducted under the same conditions as the main study.

The participants had no trouble to understand and complete the surveys. Confirmation that an average of 20 minutes were required for completion of the questionnaire was obtained. The results attained from the pilot study were not used in the final study.

4.6.3 Analysis of data

The analysis of data involves the organisation and summarisation of all data collected from participants, and to explain the whole data set (Baloglu & Usakli, 2017:243). Ways to analyse large amounts of data include IBM SPSS, Minitab, Stata and Statistica software. The use of software requires an understanding of its basic techniques (Brunt et al., 2017:172). Therefore, SPSS, version 27 was employed with the assistance of a

statistical analyst. Graphs and frequency tables were used in the analysis of data. In addition, descriptive statistics to determine mean score, standard deviation, and the median were applied.

4.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness of research may be established by various methods, such as examining the reliability, internal/external, and objectivity of a study (Malakoff, 2012). These methods are explained below.

4.7.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to “the degree of consistency that the instrument or procedure demonstrates whatever the tool is measuring”. This means the tool must give consistent results every time it is used (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:131; Mustafa, 2010:220). Hence, a pilot study was conducted for this study, as discussed in section 4.6.2 above. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were also calculated to analyse or test for internal reliability. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014:197), Cronbach alpha is one of the most-used reliability measurers and an approximation of internal consistency (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:229). The Cronbach alpha values of this study are discussed in Chapter 5.

4.7.2 Validity

Van Zyl et al. (2014:123) state that validity is based on the degree to which the measuring tool can measure what it is meant to evaluate. A measuring tool meant for internal validity is a study’s capability to ascertain whether there is a causal relationship between one or more independent factors and one or more dependent variables. Internal validity is determined by how well threats, such as history, maturation, selection and pre-testing are controlled. Internal validity is used to measure the credibility of findings in most quantitative research studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:128). Internal validity can be strengthened by appropriate planning, quality control and strategies such as the selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and sample size (Patino & Ferreira, 2018:183). External validity, on the other hand, is used to generalise the research study sample (Stumpfegger, 2017). Therefore, to secure the validity of

findings, the researcher employed research methods that reflected the type, format and depth of data as required to answer this study's research questions accurately. The self-administered questionnaire was constructed in an understandable manner. No ambiguous words were used; hence, a pre-test was conducted to ensure clarity of the questions. Also, the questionnaire was previewed by an expert within the industry. The right representatives or participants were selected in adequate numbers; however, this was incapacitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The validity of the study was further heightened by describing the findings in a very elaborate manner, by including opposing evidence in the research results, and by employing an external auditor to assess the whole research paper (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:199-201).

4.8 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The researcher's role was to conduct and manage the research project, which included the sourcing and selection of research participants, safekeeping of data collected from participants, and guaranteeing of participants' safety and anonymity. The researcher also ensured that the data collected were analysed and transformed into meaningful practical figures to reach the findings of this study.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As explained in section 1.19, research must be conducted in such a manner that it does not intentionally or unintentionally, psychologically, financially, or socially harm participants (Polonsky & Waller, 2015:79). No harm was inflicted upon respondents. The privacy of the participants was not invaded, and the execution and representation of the study's work were represented in an honest manner (Bryman, 2012:135-143).

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher submitted a request for ethical clearance from the institution's Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC). This form included the researcher's particulars, stipulation of information that would be provided to participants, the sample information, risks, benefits of the study, and a clear explanation of the consent form to be given to participants. Handling of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of data were included. Ethical clearance was granted by the FRIC, whereafter the researcher commenced with the study.

4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the research methodology undertaken and applied in this study. The methods were then explained extensively, including the research strategy, research design, data collection and analysis thereof. This chapter further discussed the trustworthiness approach taken in this study, including ethical measures taken.

The chapter elaborated that a whole frame sampling was employed, as all 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein were invited to participate in this study. The subsequent chapter will explain the results obtained from the research.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings gathered for the study will be reported in this chapter. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to interpret the data. The response rate of respondents and the analysis of the results regarding demographics will also be discussed. Furthermore, the mean scores of expectations and perceptions, including comparisons of mean scales between different positions of employees of the participating hotels, will be explained. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to analyse differences of means will be reported. Lastly, the reliability of the measuring tool will be discussed.

5.2 RESPONSE RATE

Unfortunately, the data collection phase of this study coincided with or occurred during the early stages of the COVID-19 period whereby hotels were forced to either close temporarily or permanently, while the operating hotels had to continue with reduced staff members (Pillay, Cingo-Ngandu & Rooplal, 2021). It should therefore be noted that employee numbers of Bloemfontein hotels were decreased due to the devastating impact of COVID-19. For instance, Hotel C had 22 housekeeping staff members prior to COVID-19 and had to decrease the number of employees to 15. One hotel that was to form part of this study closed as a result of the pandemic. To ensure the confidentiality of the participating hotels, they were referred to as Hotel A, Hotel B, Hotels C, Hotel D, Hotel E and Hotel F.

Table 5.1 below depicts the response rate of respondents as a percentage of the total number of housekeeping employees per hotel. The lowest response rate was reported from Hotel A (50%), as six questionnaires were distributed to Hotel A; however, only three completed questionnaires were received. The highest response rate (100%) was reported from Hotel C and Hotel E.

Table 5.1: Response rate of housekeeping employee respondents

Hotel	Total number of housekeeping employees	Returned questionnaires	Response percentage	Frequency	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Hotel A	6	3	50%	3	4.3	4.3
Hotel B	22	21	95%	21	30.0	34.3
Hotel C	15	15	100%	15	21.4	55.7
Hotel D	20	19	95%	19	27.1	82.9
Hotel E	6	6	100%	6	8.6	91.4
Hotel F	7	6	86%	6	8.6	100.0
Total	76	70		70	100.0	

5.3 DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

5.3.1 Demographic profiles

A total of 70 completed questionnaires were collected from respondents at the six participating hotels. Seven demographic variables, namely gender, age, race, education level, employment status, years employed, and position were collected.

5.3.1.1 Gender

The gender composition is indicated in Figure 5.1 below. The majority of the housekeeping staff members were female (67,1%) while male respondents were 32,9%.

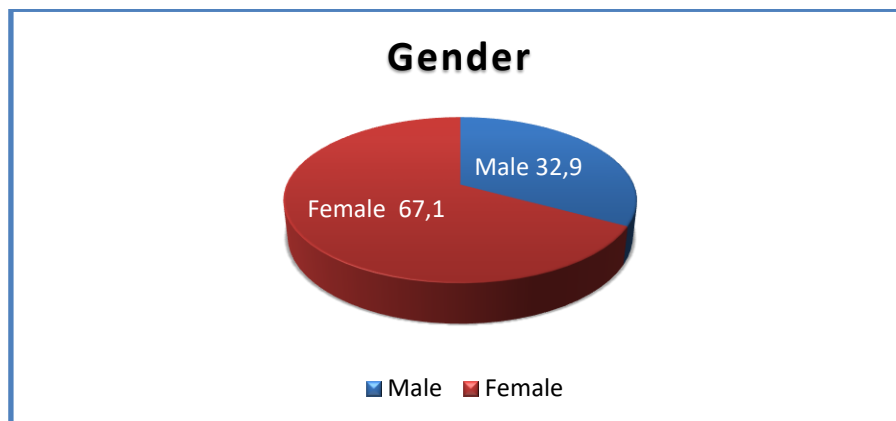


Figure 5.1: Gender composition of respondents

5.3.1.2 Age

The age composition of the respondents is presented in Figure 5.2 below. It is indicated that 7,1% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24, while respondents aged between 45 and 54 years also contributed 7,1%. Most respondents' age ranged between 25 and 34 years (42,9%), closely followed by the age group 35 to 44 years old (41,4%). Only 1,4% of the respondents were between 55 and 64 years old. It is common for most room attendants to be young and middle-aged females due to the type of work effort it takes (Chun-Fang & Bang-Zhi, 2017:373).

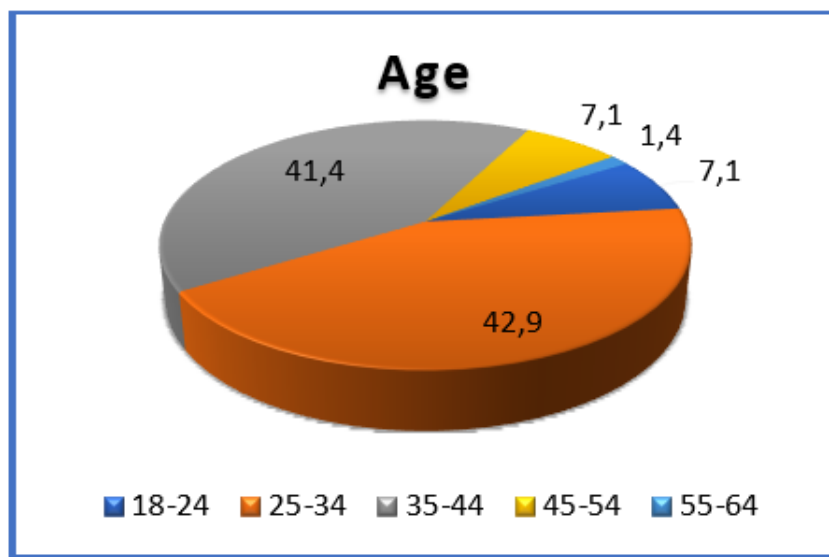


Figure 5.2: Age composition of respondents

5.3.1.3 Racial groups

Indicated in Figure 5.3 below, the majority of the respondents were Black Africans (97,1%), with only 1,4% being Coloured and 1,4% Asians.

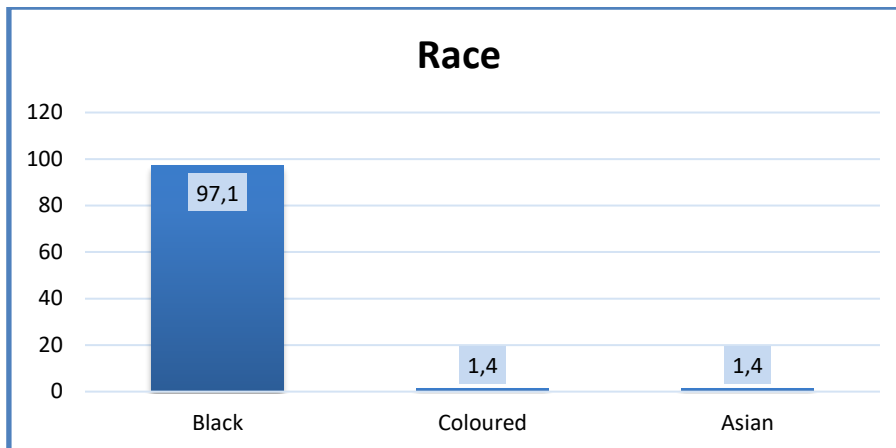


Figure 5.3: Race distribution of respondents

5.3.1.4 Education level

Table 5.2 below illustrates that most respondents (74,3%) had completed high school; 12,9% had a college certificate; and 8,6% had obtained a university qualification. Only 4,3% of the respondents had not completed secondary school. It is best to employ educated employees, because according to Tavitiyaman et al. (2021:7, 5), employees with a higher level of education can comprehend information better and are more productive.

Table 5.2: Education level composition of respondents

Education level					
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary School	3	4.3	4.3	4.3
	High School	52	74.3	74.3	78.6
	College	9	12.9	12.9	91.4
	University	6	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

5.3.1.5 Employment status

As depicted in Figure 5.4 below, respondents were employed either on a casual (18,6%), contract (5,7%), fixed-term (1,4%) or permanent basis (majority of 71,4%). Two respondents did not complete the employment status question. According to Bajorek and Guest (2019:5-6), non-permanent employees may have a negative impact on permanent employees. Permanent employees are obligated with the responsibility of training, supervising, and coordinating temporary staff while also fearing for their job being overtaken by temporary staff. Also, non-permanent employees are not as committed to the job as permanent employees. Therefore, the job security, commitment, including performance, are affected negatively.

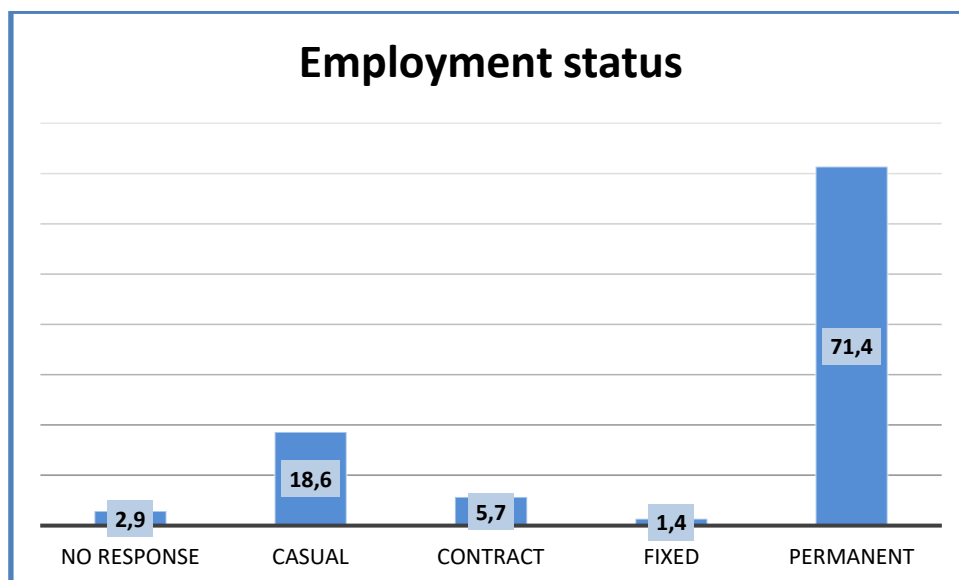


Figure 5.4: Employment status of respondents

5.3.1.6 Years of employment

With regard to tenure, a high number of respondents had been employed at the same hotel for a period of more than three years. Indicated in Figure 5.5 below, most respondents (38,6%) had been employed for a period of one to four years, followed closely with 35,7% of respondents being employed for a period of five to nine years. 8,6% of respondents have been employed between 10 to 20 years. This is encouraging, as a high level of job tenure may contribute to delivery of consistent high-quality service (Lee et al., 2017:168; 171-172), as well as increased productivity (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021:15). Only 1,4% of the respondents were employed for more than 20 years. The rest of the respondents (14,3%) had been employed for less than one year. One respondent did not complete the years of employment question.

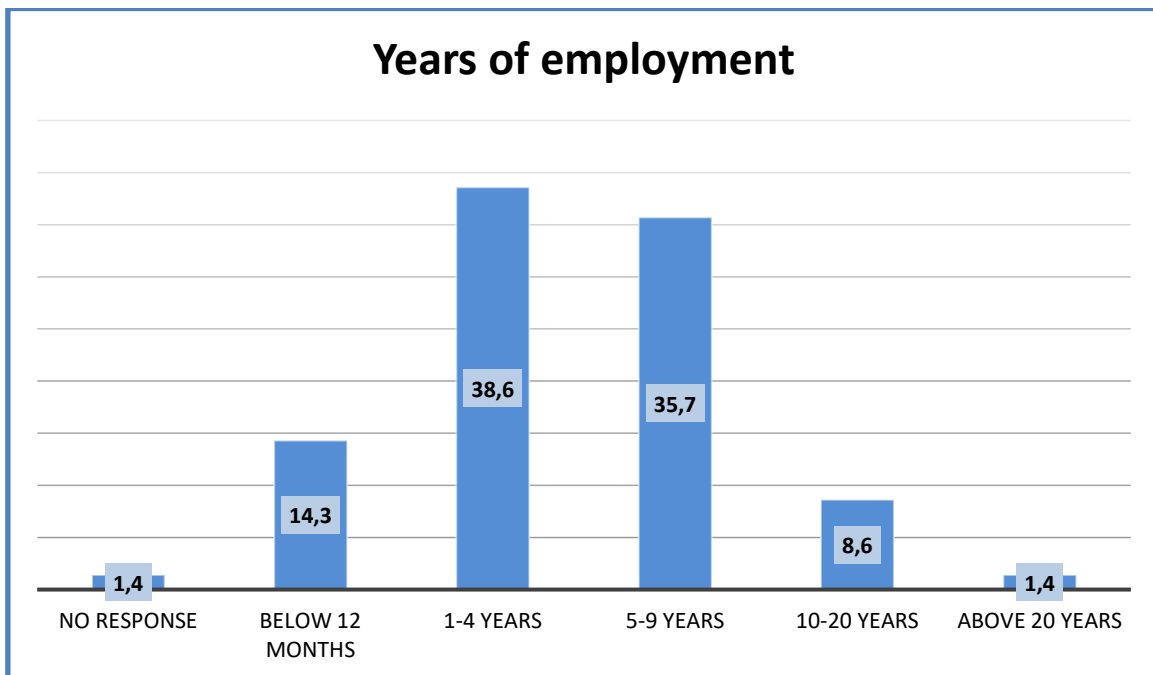


Figure 5.5: Years of employment of respondents

5.3.1.7 Position

As depicted in Figure 5.6 below, the majority (84,3%) of employees within the housekeeping department were room attendants, as expected. Respondents occupying maintenance positions comprised 8,6% and only 4,3% were employed in housekeeping management positions. According to a study conducted by Ali et al. (2021:11), with regard to survey response rates of hospitality professionals, non-managerial employees are usually the most responsive group. These researchers conducted a study on the

response rates within the hospitality industry, with accommodations as one of the industries studied, and results indicated that managers responded less often than employees. It was stated that the reason for the lower response could be due to the fact that managers are usually much busier. Two respondents (2,9%) did not indicate the position in which they were employed.

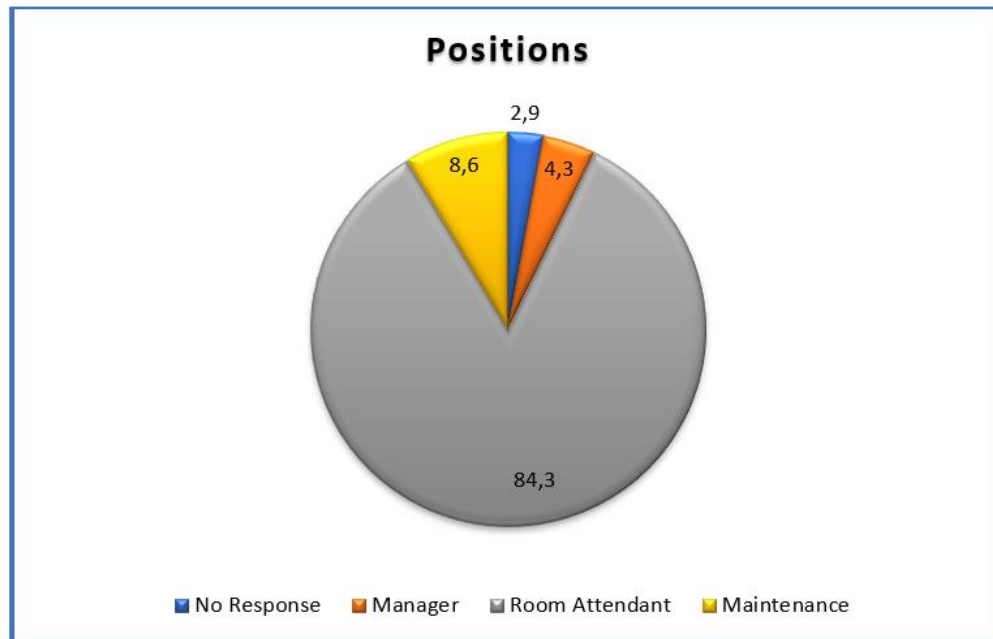


Figure 5.6: Position in housekeeping department

5.4 INFERENCE STATISTICS

5.4.1 Paired t-tests

To compare the expectation scores of respondents to the perception scores of respondents, on the five dimensions of service quality (*reliability* – consistency and accuracy of performance as promised; *empathy* – caring and giving individualised attention to customers by employees; *assurance* – knowledge of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence; *responsiveness* – willingness to offer help and provide prompt service to customers; and *tangibles* – physical facilities and representation of service), paired T-tests were performed in SPSS version 27. The results of the paired *t*-tests analysis are shown in the following section.

5.4.2 The arithmetic means of expectations and perceptions

In this section, the results of the paired t -tests analysis are shown in the tables below. The gap scores in these tables are calculated as the mean perception scores minus the mean expectation scores (P-E). The gap scores enable an understanding of current service quality and also quantifying existing gaps.

The t -value, p -value and Cohen's d -effect were calculated for each comparison. The p -value for a paired t -test is deemed to be statistically significant if the p value is lower than 0.05 ($p < .05$). In addition, the Cohen's d effect size was calculated for each paired t -test comparison. The Cohen's d -effect-size is a quantitative measure of the magnitude for the difference between two means. The following rule of thumb was used to interpret the Cohen's d -effect: A value of 0.20 represents a small effect size. A value of 0.50 represents a medium effect size. A value of 0.8 represents a large effect size (Cohens, 1992:157; Cumming & Calin-Jageman, 2017:179). The grand mean score for each service quality dimension was also calculated in Table 5.8.

As can be seen in Table 5.3 below, all gap scores of all the individual items for the reliability dimension were negative, implying that expectations were not being met. Item 3, *the department is dependable to perform services the first time* (0,012); Item 4, *the department provides services at the time promised* (0.001); and Item 5, *the department can provide guests with correct information* (0,024) indicated a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions ($p < .05$). These three items obtained the widest gap scores of -0,243, -0,357 and 0,214, meaning the department needs to put more emphasis on dependability, providing services to customers at the promised time, and the provision of correct information to guests. It seems employees are somewhat satisfied with how the department shows sincere interest in solving problems raised by customers (Item 2, lowest gap score of -0,086).

Table 5.3: Gap mean difference between expectations and perceptions of reliability dimension

Description of Items	Mean Expectation Scores		Mean Perception Scores		Gap Scores (P-E)		t-value (df=69)	p-value	Cohen's d*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
RELIABILITY DIMENSION	3,417	0,449	3,206	0,538	-0,211	0,620	-2,852	0,006	0,620
1.When the department promises to do something within a certain timeframe, they do	3,286	0,617	3,129	0,721	-0,157	0,828	-1,588	0,117	0,828
2.The department shows sincere interest in solving problems raised by customers	3,486	0,531	3,400	0,689	-0,086	0,717	-1,000	0,321	0,717
3.The department is dependable to perform services the first time	3,371	0,663	3,129	0,797	-0,243	0,788	-2,578	0,012	0,788
4.The department provides services at the time promised	3,371	0,745	3,014	0,860	-0,357	0,901	-3,315	0,001	0,901
5.The department can provide guests with correct information	3,571	0,604	3,357	0,781	-0,214	0,778	-2,304	0,024	0,778

Table 5.4 below indicates that all gap scores of all the individual items for the responsiveness dimension were negative, implying that expectations were higher than perceptions. The highest mean expectation score (3,629), as well as the highest mean perception score (3,571) were from Item 8, *the department is always willing to help customers*. However, there was no statistical significance as with the rest of the items. Only Item 7, *the department provides prompt services to customers*, with the second-highest mean expectation score of 3,514, and mean perception score of 3,343, obtained the largest gap score of -0,171 ($p < .05$). Therefore, to ensure that requests not attended to are not turned into complaints, the promptness of providing services to customers by the department needs improvement the most under the responsive dimension.

Table 5.4: Gap mean difference between expectations and perceptions of responsiveness dimension

Description of Items	Mean Expectation Scores		Mean Perception Scores		Gap Scores (P-E)		t-value (df=69)	p-value	Cohen's d*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION	3,493	0,470	3,404	0,455	-0,089	0,310	-2,410	0,019	0,310
6.The department informs customers exactly when service will be performed	3,357	0,660	3,300	0,709	-0,057	0,611	-0,782	0,437	0,611
7.The department provides prompt services to customers	3,514	0,558	3,343	0,587	-0,171	0,450	-3,191	0,002	0,450
8.The department is always willing to help customers	3,629	0,569	3,571	0,579	-0,057	0,376	-1,270	0,208	0,376
9.The department is never too busy to assist customers	3,471	0,756	3,400	0,710	-0,071	0,520	-1,150	0,254	0,520

Looking at Table 5.5 below, of all the four items, only Item 12, *the department receives enough support from management to do the job well*, acquired the widest gap score of -0,235. Item 12 indicated a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions ($p < .05$). Managerial support has been proven to contribute to improving service quality. As resulted in a study conducted by Ogbonnaya (2019), managerial support establishes dedicated staff, enthusiastic staff with a positive attitude, staff that

participate in positive word of mouth about their place of work, workers that feel appreciated at work. Therefore, the gap between expectations and perceptions of Item 12 must be narrowed (see recommendations under section 6.4).

The highest mean expectation (3,629) and perception score (3,529) with $p > .05$, was from Item 10, *the department can be trusted by customers*. This is encouraging because as stated in section 3.6.4, one of the roles of room attendants is to be trustworthy. The lowest expectation score was Item 13, *customers' behaviour inspire confidence in the department's staff*. This is expected, as inspiration and encouragement of staff typically come from the supervisors (Heathfield, 2021). It should, however, be noted that all gap scores of all the individual items for the assurance dimension were negative, implying that expectations were higher than perceptions.

Table 5.5: Gap Mean difference between expectations and perceptions of assurance dimension

Description of Items	Mean Expectation Scores		Mean Perception Scores		Gap Scores (P-E)		t-value (df=69)	p-value	Cohen's d*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
ASSURANCE DIMENSION	3,436	0,521	3,298	0,539	-0,138	0,432	-2,673	0,009	0,432
10.The department can be trusted by customers	3,629	0,569	3,529	0,675	-0,100	0,486	-1,721	0,090	0,486
11.The department's staff is polite to customers	3,543	0,606	3,514	0,583	-0,029	0,416	-0,575	0,567	0,416
12.The department receives enough support from management to do the job well	3,353	0,728	3,118	0,907	-0,235	0,775	-2,504	0,015	0,775
13.Customers' behaviour inspire confidence in the department's staff	3,200	0,754	3,014	0,825	-0,186	0,839	-1,852	0,068	0,839

Table 5.6 below, denotes that there was not a statistically significant difference ($p > .05$) between expectations and perceptions for three of the items (Item 14, *the department gives individual attention to customers*; Item 15, *the department has customers' best interest at heart*; and Item 16, *the department understands the needs of customers*). Item 15 showed a positive gap score of +0,043, indicating that perceptions exceeded expectations. When perceptions are higher than expectations it could imply a surplus in availability of input resources towards a service. Perhaps management can reduce resources under items whereby perception of service quality exceeds expectations and focuses on increasing resources to items with wide service quality gaps.

Item 16 indicated the highest mean expectation scores (3,551) followed by Item 14 (3,507). This is likely due to the nature of the hospitality industry. Giving guests personalised attention is a guaranteed way of return guests (Morais, 2019). The highest perception mean score was Item 15 (3,522), followed by Item 14 (3,478). The greatest gap score, with the only $p < .05$, is Item 17, *the department's working hours are convenient*. Therefore, the gap between expectations and perceptions of convenient working hours within the department needs improvement mostly.

Table 5.6: Gap mean difference between expectations and perceptions of empathy dimension

Description of Items	Mean Expectation Scores		Mean Perception Scores		Gap Scores (P-E)		t-value (df=69)	p-value	Cohen's d*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
EMPATHY DIMENSION	3,446	0,519	3,357	0,586	-0,089	0,446	-1,673	0,099	0,446
14.The department gives individual attention to customers	3,507	0,633	3,478	0,609	-0,029	0,453	-0,532	0,597	0,453
15.The department has customers' best interest at heart	3,478	0,609	3,522	0,584	0,043	0,435	0,830	0,409	0,435
16.The department understands the needs of customers	3,551	0,607	3,449	0,607	-0,101	0,489	-1,722	0,090	0,489
17.The department's working hours are convenient	3,229	0,854	3,086	0,897	-0,143	0,597	-2,003	0,049	0,597

Indicated in Table 5.7 below, all gap scores were substantially wide, which raises great apprehensions. The p values for all items in the tangibles dimension were $< .05$, indicating a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions. The two highest mean expectation scores were Item 21, *the work environment in the department is comfortable* (3,420) and Item 19, *the appearance of the workplace facilities is attractive/visually appealing* (3,400). The highest in mean perception score were also Item 19 (3,186) and Item 21 (3,159). Expectations are certainly not met in the tangibles dimension. Major improvements with regard to equipment, appearance of staff, work facilities, and technology are required.

Table 5.7: Gap mean difference between expectations and perceptions of tangibles dimension

Description of Items	Mean Expectation Scores		Mean Perception Scores		Gap Scores (P-E)		t-value (df=69)	p-value	Cohen's d*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
TANGIBLES DIMENSION	3,218	0,637	2,943	0,668	-0,275	0,719	-3,201	0,002	0,719
18.The department equipment is up to date	3,086	0,864	2,714	0,965	-0,371	1,010	-3,078	0,003	1,010
19.The appearance of the workplace facilities is attractive/visually appealing	3,400	0,646	3,186	0,839	-0,214	0,849	-2,111	0,038	0,849
20.The staff in the department is neat and well-dressed	3,000	0,901	2,743	0,958	-0,257	0,943	-2,281	0,026	0,943
21.The work environment in the department is comfortable	3,420	0,628	3,159	0,740	-0,261	0,760	-2,850	0,006	0,760

Table 5.8 below proves that service quality gaps exist. All the gap scores for all five dimensions were negative, implying that overall expectations were not met. Four of the five service quality dimensions showed a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions ($p < .05$). It is further observed that the gap score for the tangibles dimension is the largest (-0,275), with a medium effect size. This is a great concern, as tangibility is one of the key influencers in customer decision making and acquiring customer satisfaction (Panda & Das, 2014:63). The second-largest gap score was for the reliability dimension (-0,211) also having a medium-effect size. Assurance dimension followed, with a gap score of -0,138 (small effect). This reveals that the most important dimensions are tangibles and reliability. These dimensions need to be considered to improve customer satisfaction. The least important dimensions were empathy (-0,089) and responsiveness (-0.089), both with a small effect size.

Table 5.8: Summary gap mean difference between expectations and perceptions

Description of Items	Mean Expectation Scores		Mean Perception Scores		Gap Scores (P-E)		t-value df=69	p-value	Cohen's d*	Effect size
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
TANGIBLES	3,218	0,637	2,943	0,668	-0,275	0,719	-3,201	0,002	0,719	Medium
RELIABILITY	3,417	0,449	3,206	0,538	-0,211	0,620	-2,852	0,006	0,620	Medium
ASSURANCE	3,436	0,521	3,298	0,539	-0,138	0,432	-2,673	0,009	0,432	Small
EMPATHY	3,446	0,519	3,357	0,586	-0,089	0,446	-1,673	0,099	0,446	Small
RESPONSIVENESS	3,493	0,470	3,404	0,455	-0,089	0,310	-2,410	0,019	0,310	Small

5.4.3 ANOVA

One of the objectives of the study was to determine if there was any difference in perceptions of housekeeping employees and management's perception. A one-way ANOVA between the different subjects was conducted to achieve this objective. ANOVA examines differences among three or more means by comparing the variations within and across groups. The tables below show the results of the one-way ANOVA.

Table 5.9 below provides descriptive statistics, which include the mean, standard deviation and 95% confidence intervals for the different positions in the five dimensions of service quality.

Table 5.9: Descriptive statistics of differences between the perceptions of housekeeping positions

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Reliability Perception	Housekeeping Manager	3	3,07	0,42	0,24	2,03	4,10
	Room Attendant	59	3,20	0,56	0,07	3,06	3,35
	Maintenance	6	3,43	0,20	0,08	3,23	3,64
	Total	68	3,22	0,54	0,07	3,09	3,35
Responsiveness Perception	Housekeeping Manager	3	3,75	0,25	0,14	3,13	4,37
	Room Attendant	59	3,40	0,46	0,06	3,28	3,52
	Maintenance	6	3,38	0,41	0,17	2,94	3,81
	Total	68	3,41	0,45	0,06	3,30	3,52
Assurance Perception	Housekeeping Manager	3	3,00	1,09	0,63	0,29	5,71
	Room Attendant	59	3,32	0,53	0,07	3,18	3,46
	Maintenance	6	3,33	0,44	0,18	2,87	3,79
	Total	68	3,31	0,54	0,07	3,17	3,44
Empathy Perception	Housekeeping Manager	3	2,75	1,56	0,90	-1,13	6,63
	Room Attendant	59	3,41	0,54	0,07	3,27	3,55
	Maintenance	6	3,29	0,33	0,14	2,94	3,64
	Total	68	3,37	0,59	0,07	3,22	3,51
Tangibles Perception	Housekeeping Manager	3	2,42	1,23	0,71	-0,65	5,48
	Room Attendant	59	2,96	0,63	0,08	2,80	3,13
	Maintenance	6	3,08	0,83	0,34	2,21	3,96
	Total	68	2,95	0,68	0,08	2,79	3,11

The output of the ANOVA analysis determining whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the groups' means is shown in Table 5.10 below. It can

be seen that the significance value of the different groups under all five dimensions of service quality is above 0.05. If ANOVA yields a significant value ($p < .05$) for F result, the researcher must follow up using a post-hoc comparison of means (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:368; Simkus, 2022). However, the one-way ANOVA reveals that there was not a statistically significant difference in mean perception score between the groups under all the service quality dimensions, reliability dimension ($F(2,65) = [0,616]$, $p = 0,543$), responsiveness ($F(2,65) = [0,873]$, $p = 0,423$), assurance ($F(2,65) = [0,491]$, $p = 0,614$), empathy ($F(2,65) = [1,861]$, $p = 0,164$), as well as tangibles ($F(2,65) = [1,063]$, $p = 0,351$). This implies that overall perceptions of service quality of employees of managerial positions and non-managerial positions within the housekeeping department are similar.

Table 5.10: One-way ANOVA analysis

		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Reliability Perception	Between Groups	2	0,180	0,616	0,543
	Within Groups	65	0,292		
	Total	67			
Responsiveness Perception	Between Groups	2	0,181	0,873	0,423
	Within Groups	65	0,207		
	Total	67			
Assurance Perception	Between Groups	2	0,148	0,491	0,614
	Within Groups	65	0,301		
	Total	67			
Empathy Perception	Between Groups	2	0,635	1,861	0,164
	Within Groups	65	0,341		
	Total	67			
Tangibles Perception	Between Groups	2	0,484	1,063	0,351
	Within Groups	65	0,455		
	Total	67			

The sequential section will discuss the reliability of the measuring tool.

5.4.4 Reliability of the measuring tool

To assess the reliability of the measurement tool, internal consistency was measured. Measuring tools cannot be valid without initially being reliable (Fouché et al., 2021:206). According to Hair et al. (2017:111-112), the traditional manner of measuring the internal consistency of a measuring tool is with Cronbach's alpha. The composite reliability should have a value of 0.60 to 0.70 to be acceptable, or between 0.70 and 0.90, which is regarded as satisfactory.

Table 5.11: Cronbach's Alpha of the measuring tool

Variable	Cronbach's alpha		N of items
	Expectations	Perceptions	
Reliability	0,748	0,736	5
Responsiveness	0,714	0,654	4
Assurance	0,778	0,676	4
Empathy	0,754	0,816	4
Tangibles	0,794	0,743	4

As shown in Table 5.11 above, the reliability of the instrument was evaluated via Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's α coefficient of all variables was above 0.65, which indicates a reliable questionnaire.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988:28), the scale of measure must meet certain conceptual criteria such as construct validity (face or content validity). Face validity is the degree to which the instrument measures a specific variable, also ensuring the cooperation of participation in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021:128). The question relevant to face validity would be whether the measuring procedure looks like it measures the variable it claims to measure. Face validity does not refer to the measuring tool's ability to measure but to what it appears (concerns superficial appearance) to measure. Face validity may be evaluated by experts in the field to assess if the measuring's scaling format is appropriate and clear, that questions are accurately written with an appropriate, clear font size, as well as to ensure that the items are not repeated (Fouché et al., 2021:202).

Content validity is vital regarding representativeness of the content, such as the topic of an instrument. The items of the measuring tool must be relevant to the concept of

measurement (Fouché et al., 2021:201). All important aspects of validity related to the objective must be included in the questionnaire. For instance all factors to measure service quality must be included. Senior research persons or experts' opinion may be employed to ensure the inclusion of these vital aspects (Zia, 2021). To develop the SERVQUAL questionnaire, all required conceptual criteria as above were met and therefore depicts the tool to possess content validity (Parasuraman et al., 1988:28). The SERVQUAL questionnaire is a previously used measuring tool and therefore its validity is secure.

5.5 GENERAL DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The differences between housekeeping employees' overall expectations and their perceptions of service quality at selected Bloemfontein hotels were examined. This was conducted to enable housekeeping management of the selected Bloemfontein hotels to quantify the gaps that exist and combat service quality delivery challenges within the housekeeping departments.

The main aim of the study was to identify employee perceptions of service quality and the associated challenges they experience within the housekeeping departments of 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded Bloemfontein hotels. Results indicate that housekeeping employees' perceptions were constantly lower than their expectations. The negative gaps mean service quality delivery is not met and improvement is necessary. A summary of challenges and implications, as discussed in section 5.5.4, includes unsatisfactory equipment, lack of training to ensure items with the highest gaps scores indicated below are met, and lack of managerial support to the housekeeping employees. These perceptions and challenges are discussed in the subsequent sections based on the study's research objectives below.

5.5.1 Objective 1: Determining service quality dimensions perceived vital by housekeeping employees of 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein

The SERVQUAL tool uses the five dimensions to measure Service Quality. Service providers can use these dimensions to determine which specific areas of service delivery to put more emphasis on in order to improve on customer needs. These five

dimensions are tangibility (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials), reliability (the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence), and empathy (the caring and individualised attention the company provides to its customers).

As observed in Table 5.8, it was evident that the reliability dimension and the tangibles dimension require the most attention. This shows that the reliability and tangibles dimensions are especially important when measuring service quality in hotels.

According to Fazlić and Fazlović (2014:157-158), reliability is the core of the services and the prerequisite for the success of other dimensions. Reliability is showing sincere interest in solving customers' problems, performing services right the first time, providing services at the time promised and providing accurate information to customers. If any business is unreliable, other great services provided will not have any positive impact on overall satisfaction to the guests. Failure to provide guests with consistent and prompt service as promised jeopardises customer loyalty. Hotel specialist Fernandez emphasises that consistency is more detrimental now after the COVID-19 pandemic to improve on service quality. Strong hotels should be able to maintain consistency despite unusual situations; staff must know how to respond to the situation aptly (Fernandez, 2021). It is also stated in the literature that reliability has constantly demonstrated to be an important influence in service quality and the core improvement mechanism to service quality delivery (Mmutle and Shonhe, 2017:6).

The tangibles dimension had the largest gap score of -0,275, followed by reliability dimension, which attained the second largest gap score of -0,211. The findings are in line with the study by Sigala (2008), where the tangibles dimension was observed to be the most important dimension of SERVQUAL. Bakirtzoglou, Vryoni and Ioannou's (2018:327) study found that tangibles, reliability and responsiveness were important factors in customer satisfaction improvement from employees' perspective. These results suggest that the physical facilities (equipment, personnel, communication tools and technology) of the housekeeping departments of selected Bloemfontein hotels lack the ability to reach customer satisfaction. Though better engineering towards tangibles

of a hotel to improve work conditions of housekeeping is difficult (CCOHS, 2021), it is vital to maintain and keep the quality of the physical building intact.

This is, however, not limited only to regular maintenance and upgrading of material but improved/updated technology should also be prioritised within housekeeping departments. Technology will assist in efficiency and time management, enhance support required by room attendants to clean the guestrooms, improve housekeeping operations, as well as the employment of better, cost-effective ways of doing laundry, etc. As indicated in Chapter 1, section 1.9, one of the issues in housekeeping departments is being behind or outmoded in what the millennial customer wants. Overall, the hospitality industry should be able to adapt to evolving customers' consumption and travel behaviour. The importance of attracting the new generation of technophiles, or those enthusiastic about new technology (Kansakar et al., 2018:1) was also highlighted. 'Tangible' also includes the appearance of the workplace and staff. Implications of non-adherence such issues are addressed in sections to follow.

The assurance dimension (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence) received a gap score of 0,138, with a statistically significant difference in mean expectations and perceptions. Empathy dimension (the caring and individualised attention the company provides to its customers) scored lower gap scores of -0,089, with no statistical significance. This implies that although there is room for improvement in all dimensions, the housekeeping departments are doing fairly well in caring and giving individualised attention to customers by employees. This could be due to the people-orientated nature of the accommodation industry.

Although the responsiveness dimension (the willingness to offer help and provide prompt service to customers) also indicated the lowest gap score of -0.089 in this study, it is to be read with caution. As mentioned under Table 5.4, the *p* value of all other items under responsiveness dimension, with the exception of Item 7 (*The department provides prompt services to customers*), were above 0.05, indicating that there was no statistical significance, meaning that expectations were met. Therefore, Item 7 (*p* value of 0.002) influenced the whole or overall outcome of the responsiveness dimension. Nonetheless, there is room for development in responsiveness and the housekeeping departments must focus more on ensuring the provision of timely services to customers.

5.5.2 OBJECTIVE 2: DETERMINE DIFFERENCES IN HOUSEKEEPING EMPLOYEES AND MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTIONS

5.5.2.1 Employee perceptions

Based on the findings depicted in Table 5.3 to Table 5.7, nine items were statistically significant with $p < .05$. These included Items 3 to 5, (*the department is dependable to perform services the first time; the department provides services at the time promised; the department can provide guests with correct information*); Item 7, *the department provides prompt services to customers*; Item 12, *the department receives enough support from management to do the job well*; and Items 17 to 21 (*the department's working hours are convenient; the department equipment is up to date; the appearance of the workplace facilities is attractive/visually appealing; the staff in the department is neat and well-dressed; the work environment in the department is comfortable*).

Of the nine items above, the top three mean expectation scores ($p < .05$) were:

- Item 5 (3,571), the department can provide guests with correct information, which refers to the reliability dimension;
- Item 7 (3,514), the department provides prompt services to customers referring to the responsiveness dimension; and
- Item 21 (3,420), the work environment in the department is comfortable from the tangibles dimension.

The rest of the mean expectations scores, such as Item 3, *the department is dependable to perform services the first time* (gap score of -0,243, p -value of 0.012); Item 4, *the department provides services at the time promised* (gap score -0,357, $p < .05$); Item 12, *The department receives enough support from management to do the job well* (gap score of -0,235, $p < .05$); and Item 17, *the department's working hours are convenient*, were not vastly different from the top three items above, indicating a general high expectation by employees from the housekeeping departments.

The three largest mean perception scores with a statistically significant $p < 0.05$ were:

- Item 5 (3,357), the department can provide guests with correct information, which refers to the reliability dimension,
- Item 7 (3,343), the department provides prompt services to customers, which refers to the responsiveness dimension and
- Item 19 (3,186), the appearance of the workplace facilities is attractive/visually appealing (Tangible dimension).

These indicate that employees perceive the above items as vital to delivery of quality service.

- Item 3 (-0,243), the department is dependable to perform services the first time, under reliability dimension;
- Item 4 (-0,357), the department provides services at the time promised, under reliability dimension;
- Item 5 (-0,214), the department can provide guests with correct information, under reliability dimension;
- Item 12 (-0,235), the department receives enough support from management to do the job well under assurance dimension;
- Item 18 (-0,371), the department equipment is up to date under tangibles dimension; and
- Item 21 (-0,261), the work environment in the department is comfortable, also under tangibles dimension.

These results are highlighted in some of the comments stated by respondents of the selected hotels in Bloemfontein, which included comments such as, *“I wish the hotel can upgrade and do things perfectly and all departments work together and stay strongly”*; *“The customers always complain”*; and *“I think the department should work hand in hand with the management so that we can take the business to the next level”*. Such comments should be taken into consideration when planning on how to improve processes and procedures within the housekeeping departments. This is elaborated upon in the last paragraph of section 6.4.

5.5.2.2 Management and non-management differences in perceptions

It was vital to compare the differences with regard to how management perceives service quality from employees, because managers, as inspectors or assessors of employees, must know how to perceive the quality of services correctly. If the management scores higher in perceptions of service quality than employees, they will be incapable of leading their employees to meet the desired level of service (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015:134). Fortunately, that was not the case between the management and employees of housekeeping departments of the selected Bloemfontein hotels.

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine if there were any differences between the expectations and perceptions of employees with the position of manager, room attendant or maintenance. There was no statistical significance between the expectations and perceptions of managers and employees. No two groups were statistically significantly different for any of the three expectation scales, meaning there was no difference between managers and non-managerial employees. This suggests that managerial positions and non-managerial positions are similar with what they expect and perceive of the service delivery within their housekeeping departments.

5.5.3 OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFICATION OF MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY HOUSEKEEPING EMPLOYEES BASED ON THE EMPLOYEES' EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

The gap scores are the differences between perception scores and expectation scores. These may range from -6 to +6, with a 0-score indicating that expectations and perceptions match. Negative scores are an indication that expectations exceed perceptions and a positive score denotes that those perceptions exceed expectations. The highest gap scores with a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions exist in:

- Item 3 (-0,243), the department is dependable to perform services the first time, under reliability dimension;
- Item 4 (-0,357), the department provides services at the time promised, under reliability dimension;
- Item 5 (-0,214), the department can provide guests with correct information, also

under reliability dimension;

- Item 12 (-0,235), the department receives enough support from management to do the job well under assurance dimension;
- Item 18 (-0,371), *the department's equipment is up to date* under tangibles dimension; and
- Item 21 (-0,261), *the work environment in the department is comfortable* under tangibles dimension.

The least gap scores, with a statistically significant difference between expectations and perceptions were Item 7 (-0,171), *the department provides prompt services to customers* under responsiveness dimension; and Item 17 (-0,143), *the department's working hours are convenient* under empathy dimension.

Some issues such as the need for upgraded equipment and collaboration between management and employees echoed in comments of respondents, as alluded to in the preceding sections. Based on the discussions above it can be construed that there are challenges in the department's consistency of performing service the first time and at the right time as promised, provision of accurate information, lack of managerial support, faulty or impractical housekeeping equipment and conducting work in an uncomfortable environment. The following section identifies possible effects or consequences of these selected challenges, based on their wide service quality gaps.

5.5.4 OBJECTIVE 4: HOUSEKEEPING CHALLENGES AND ITS IMPACT

Many challenges based on the findings are seen; however, there are main challenges with larger service gaps that need improvement the most. These challenges and associated implications were discovered under three dimensions: reliability, assurance and tangibles. A research study was conducted to investigate the impact of service quality performance on customer satisfaction in Vietnam hotels. Results indicated the coefficients value of adjusted R-square from Model summary as .560 under assurance, reliability and tangibles, meaning the three dimensions accounted for 56% value

towards customer satisfaction (Tuan & Linh, 2014:65). It is therefore vital to pay attention to these dimensions.

5.5.4.1 Reliability

- Item 3 (-0,243), the department is dependable to perform services the first time;
- Item 4 (-0,357), the department provides services at the time promised; and
- Item 5 (-0,214), the department can provide guests with the correct information.

5.5.4.2 Assurance

- Item 12 (-0,235), the department receives enough support from management to do the job well.

5.5.4.3 Tangibles

- Item 18 (-0,371), the department's equipment is up to date; and
- Item 21 (-0,261), the work environment in the department is comfortable

Reliability suggests that a company delivers what it has promised in terms of service, pricing as communicated externally, as well as accuracy and timely handling of complaints. A company that lacks in being reliable (Items 3, 4 & 5), will eliminate any confidence the guests have (Akinyi, 2018:18). With regards to assurance (Item 12), lack of support by management or unanswered pleas for management support will affect employees' quality of work, and result in inconsistency in performance. However, when employees receive organisational support and training, they utilise the skills learned to improve employee engagement and contribute positively to their work (Shen & Tang 2018:711).

According to Tamwatin, Trimetsoontorn and Fongsuwan (2015:412), there is a connection between tangibles and customer satisfaction. Tangibles include physical features such as the appearance of the building, cleanliness of the establishment, personnel appearance, and technology. Pertaining to Item 18, cleanliness and hygiene within housekeeping are fundamental aspects in ensuring a sense of guest satisfaction; therefore, the correct equipment and products (considering the materials and design

used to make the hotel) should be a necessity (Selvaraj, 2018). The non-provision and use of good quality equipment send a strong message that a company is not concerned about service quality (Akinyi, 2018:17). A study conducted by Kimes (cited in Longart, 2020:269) confirms the importance of maintaining tangibles. The study shows that deficient hotels (hotels with a defect in the exterior, the guest rooms, and/or the guest bathrooms) make approximately two dollars less in revenue per available room (Revpar) than non-deficient hotels.

With regard to Item 21, the work environment can impact on performance. In fact, the quality of the work environment has a greater impact, even more than monetary remuneration, on motivation to perform well in a job (Chandrasekar, 2011:4).

5.5.5 OBJECTIVE 5: SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS IMPROVING THE SERVICE QUALITY OF HOUSEKEEPING DEPARTMENTS OF THE 3-, 4- AND 5-STAR-GRADED HOTELS IN BLOEMFONTEIN

The last objective of the study was to propose recommendations to contribute towards improving the service quality of housekeeping departments of the 3-, 4-, and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein. These are stipulated in the chapter to follow.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research findings were addressed in this chapter. Descriptive and inferential statistics were analysed and discussed. Firstly, information of the respondents (response rates, demographic profiles by analysing) was analysed. Secondly, descriptive comparisons of mean scores of expectations and perceptions were reported, as well as comparisons of mean scales between different positions of employees of the participating hotels. Thirdly, a one-way, between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to determine any differences between the expectations and perceptions of employees in different positions. Lastly, the reliability of the measuring tool was discussed. Conclusions and recommendations follow in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter provided an analysis of the collected data and discussed the results. Chapter 6 will conclude the study, propose recommendations, address limitations to the study and provide suggestions for future research. This study was conducted to determine employee perceptions of service quality delivery of housekeeping departments of graded hotels in Bloemfontein. The study is envisaged to assist hotel management, particularly housekeeping supervisors and management to identify gaps in the delivery of quality service and to address these gaps for the main benefit of hotel guests.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FINDINGS

This section provides a brief overview of the literature findings. Chapter 1 presented the introduction and background to the research, identifying the need for service quality improvements within the tourism and hospitality industry. Gaps left by previous researchers were identified and led to the formulation of this study's research objectives. Studies on service quality in various departments within hotels have been conducted, mostly focusing on customers' perception of service quality. This study sought to add to the miniscule research on employee perceptions of service quality, particularly within the housekeeping departments of hotels. The housekeeping department is one of the sections that can greatly impact competitiveness as it is the pillar of hotel operations for best service delivery. The methods adopted in how the study results would be achieved were concisely discussed. Chapter 2 contextualised the tourism and hospitality industry. The many definitions of the tourism and hospitality industry all explain that the industry is a very broad industry that includes movement of people from one location to the other, with the main purpose of either business or leisure. The chapter also revealed that the tourism and hospitality industry play a major role in contributing toward an economy's GDP, however faced with many varied challenges. Despite these challenges, the industry continues to survive due to its resilience. The chapter then highlighted some of the South African tourism and hospitality industry's achievements, as well as the income generated. Furthermore, the literature classified the different types of hotels since this study focused on hotels. The hotel grading system was mentioned and elaborated upon

to emphasise on its importance within the accommodation sector. The grading of hotels contributes towards maintaining *high levels of quality*, promoting value for money and ultimately ensuring that customer satisfaction is attained. This study focused on employee perceptions of *service quality* delivery in housekeeping departments of graded accommodation establishments (specifically hotels) in Bloemfontein. Chapter 3 then examined the literature in respect to *service quality*, the importance thereof, its characteristics and how to measure it. It was reiterated that establishments require great service quality to survive, stay relevant and to thrive. It is the value of service offered to a customer, which is determined by the needs, expectations and perceptions of customers. These expectations and perceptions may be discovered through quantified surveys, as this study has followed. It is evident that prominent levels of *service quality* cannot be reached without frontline and back-of-house employees. Service quality is one of the determining factors for guests to choose a destination. As stated before, this study focused on the accommodation sector (specifically the housekeeping department). The chapter continued to describe the housekeeping department, trends and challenges encountered, as well as the significance of the department. As the literature has echoed, the housekeeping department is one of the most important departments responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the perishable goods (guestrooms) responsible for at least 50% of a hotel's revenue. Unfortunately, the housekeeping department has been kept in the background, which posed a great challenge for housekeeping attendants to acquire the skill to interact professionally with guests. Some of the housekeeping challenges discovered in the literature reviewed include high staff turnover, adopting modern technologies and trends, keeping staff motivated, lack of proper communication between room attendants and supervisors, and difficulties in balancing work and family life.

Many different service quality measuring tools or models have been developed and used within the service industry over the years. Chapter 4 elaborated on the research measuring tool used, which is the most popular model applicable to service quality measuring in the tourism and hospitality industry. Hence, the theory of this study was based on the SERVQUAL model founded by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985. The SERVQUAL includes five dimensions and 22 items that explain the consumers' experience to discover perceptions of performance and expectation through a Likert-scale questionnaire. The chapter indicated that data was collected through a servqual

self-administered questionnaire. Chapter 5, then presented and interpreted the findings of the study. Empirical findings are discussed in the next section.

6.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The secondary research objectives that were set towards achieving the main aim of the study included determining the service quality dimensions perceived to be vital by housekeeping employees; determining differences in the perceptions of management and non-management positions; and identifying main challenges of and effects thereof. The SERVQUAL instrument was used to answer the research questions of the study.

Firstly, demographics findings indicate that 67,1% of the respondents were female and 32,9% were male. Most (42,9%) of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34 years old, followed closely by the age range between 35 and 44 years old. Respondents in the age range of 18 and 24, as well as the age range between 45 and 54 years old, were 7,1%. Only 1,4% of the respondents were between 55 and 64 years old. This could be due to the hard, labour-intensive nature of the housekeeping work (Nimri et al., 2020:369).

The racial group of most of the respondents was African (97,1%), followed by Coloured (1,4%) and Asian (1,4%). The majority (74,3%) of respondents had obtained a high school certificate; 12,9% had a college certificate; 8,6% had a university certificate; and only 4,3% of respondents had not completed secondary school.

The majority (71,4%) of the respondents were employed on a permanent basis; 18,6% on a casual basis; 5,7% on a contractual basis, while 1,4% of respondents were employed on a fixed-term basis. Only 1,4% of the respondents have been employed for more than 20 years, followed by respondents employed for a period of 10 to 20 years (8,6%), while 35,7% were employed for a period of five to nine years. Most of the respondents (38,6%) were employed for a period of one to four years. Also, the majority (84,3%) of respondents' positions were room attendants.

Evidence from the study shows that the focus must be placed on tangibles (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials) and reliability (the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), as these dimensions are vital when it comes to service quality. There is a link between tangibles

and customer satisfaction. Therefore, a lack of suitable physical facilities, cleanliness of the establishment, lack of personnel appearance, and technology implies that a company is not concerned about service quality. Subsequently, unreliability has a negative effect on the overall delivery of service and may eliminate any loyalty of guests.

Specific problems revealed included the department's dependability in performing service the first time; the provision of these services at the right time as promised; provision of accurate information; managerial support received by the department; up-to-date housekeeping equipment; and conducting work in a comfortable environment. If such issues are not improved and mitigated, employees' quality of work and performance are affected. This was established from the service quality gap scores which is the difference between perception scores and expectation scores.

With regard to the comparison between differences in housekeeping employees' and management perceptions' mean scores, there was no statistical significance between their perceptions and expectations of service quality of the different positions of employment under all service quality dimensions. This indicates that non-managerial employees' and managements' perceptions of service quality are similar.

Overall perceptions of employees were lower than expected, resulting in overall gap scores of all service quality dimensions being negative. This implies that the overall service quality falls below the employees' expectations. The findings of this study can be used by the management of hotels to investigate the factors that lead to negative gaps, which might lead to dissatisfaction of guests. Management can consequently strive to improve on the delivery of quality service.

It must be echoed that the focus should be placed on the identified vital dimensions (*Reliability* and *Tangibles*) to service quality to meet guest expectations. The service industry is an increasingly competitive market whereby a focus on service quality is essential for the survival of a business such as a hotel. In order for management to maintain consistency in service delivery and meet guest expectations efficiently, service quality needs to be managed better.

With the main findings in mind, the next part discusses the recommendations for the study to ensure better service delivery for hotels to their customer.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- It is suggested that all housekeeping staff be employed on a permanent basis to ensure consistency in service delivery. As indicated in 5.3.1.5, non-permanent employees may unfortunately not be fully committed to their job and impact negatively on service delivery or performance.
- Management should strive to hire qualified staff. Employees with a higher level of education are more productive and can understand information better. Based on a study conducted by Singh and Amandeep (2017:310), there will be an increase in the need for specialised staff within the hotel departments, such as Housekeeping. Hospitality management students in possession of a diploma or degree may be targeted, as well as persons with a housekeeping certificate, or any relevant qualification to hotel and housekeeping services or management.
- In relation to the recommendation above, the human resources divisions can strive to entice possible recruits and hospitality graduates in pursuing employment within the department by offering better packages for housekeeping staff. In addition, growth opportunities can be created within the housekeeping departments (for employees and hospitality graduates) and education about the importance of the housekeeping department may be offered. Hotels could liaise with hotel schools to relay and share information in this regard.
- Housekeeping tools such as vacuum machines, laundry machines, polishing machinery, ironing equipment, etc., tend to wear off over time and need to be maintained and upgraded periodically. This is one of the simple approaches to improving on housekeeping productivity (Mirani, 2021). This periodic maintenance and upgrading include physical facilities such as tiles, flooring in guestrooms, drainage systems, etc. In order for the housekeeping department to provide the appropriate equipment that ensures cleanliness and hygiene, all material utilised within a hotel must be of the finest grade, because they contribute positively to service quality (Selvaraj, 2018). Preventative

maintenance or regular checking of facilities and equipment to ensure continuous smooth running is highly recommended, as it is one of the many ways of ensuring long-lasting facilities and/or equipment, cost saving, contribution to service quality and guest satisfaction (Longart, 2020:278; Makomere, 2014:46).

- This could be accomplished by utilising computerised maintenance management systems (CMMS). For instance, the dust that accumulates in flat/industrial ironing machines should be cleaned every month and the gearbox would have to be oiled every 2 500 hours, or after a stipulated number of uses. This is scheduled in the CCMs. All costs and work that were conducted on all facilities and equipment can easily be documented and accessed. Maintenance employees designated to a particular maintenance job including alerts of any issues are indicated on the software (SM Global, 2021). Some of the best CMMS for hotels, according to a market analyst, Adair (2022), include the Hippo CMMS, Maintenance Connection and Managerplus. Actual life span of equipment may also be detected based on previously used equipment. This allows for future planning and replacements. Management must also ensure sufficient provision of equipment for each employee. This will ensure that there are no delays in the execution of tasks.
- It is further recommended that management introduce and implement new technologies and innovations in the housekeeping departments of selected Bloemfontein hotels. New technologies may include voice command apps to assist guests to be in control of guestroom items such as curtain opening, switching off the lights, and requesting assistance from room attendants and other staff members via an app.
- Another example of technology reported in the Global Banking and Finance review (GBFR, 2018) that may contribute towards improving on service delivery and ultimately improve on customer satisfaction is the SmarTap. The SmarTap allows guests to control the flow, temperature and duration of their showers. The app also assists management in monitoring the usage of water and detects any water leakages within the hotel (pilot studies revealed a 30% water reduction, and 8% energy reduction). Overall, these technologies will assist in executing housekeeping duties in a timely manner as well as improve communication and housekeeping operations.

- Reliability is the essence of every business entity. Therefore, the results of this study should be utilised in staff training and the planning of staff development programmes. Training contributes positively to customer service quality (Shen & Tang, 2018:711); therefore, training is highly recommended to ensure that housekeeping employees understand processes and procedures to be better equipped to deliver promises made to customers and to meet or exceed customers' expectations. Numerous types of training (such as orientation training, compliance training, leadership training, technical training, quality assurance training, diversity training, etc.) for employees should be made available, depending on what skills need enhancement (Gupta, 2021). It is therefore proposed that the housekeeping employees receive training in knowledge and understanding areas, facilities and all service areas of the hotel, including the exterior surrounding areas/services of the hotel. The employees should be able to inform guests of any hotel information such as service times, service areas, and directions to other departments or neighbouring services (e.g. hospitals, malls, etc.). Correct use of equipment as per manuals is vital to ensure long life and minimal maintenance. Employees should also take ownership and care of the equipment used. Training in standard operating procedures (SOPs) will inform the employees step by step how each duty (e.g. proper way of making a bed, proper way of cleaning the bathroom, etc.) must be executed and why it is specifically executed in that manner. Customer service and communication skills training would be beneficial, since housekeeping has traditionally been behind the scenes and less engaged with customers, which has not been the case in recent years. Housekeeping attendants should be able to communicate and guide guests in a friendly and professional manner.
- Digital training should be provided for the housekeeping staff. They should be comfortable working with technical tools. Quality assurance training is also suggested. This is where expected processes and methods of conducting duties within the housekeeping department can be emphasised.
- Management must then ensure that quality assurance measures are put in place. Each housekeeping employee could utilise checklists/pads to ensure that each task is done correctly as per stipulated processes and methods. Should employees fail to follow processes, systems for staff development can be

implemented.

- Management support must be amplified within the housekeeping departments of the selected Bloemfontein hotels. Better or improved supervisor support will result in increased employee performance, as well as employee retention (Karatepe, 2014:388). It is therefore imperative to create a strong supportive culture within the housekeeping departments. This may be attained by better channels of communication between managers/supervisors and non-managerial positions, assisting staff with challenging tasks, making collaborated decisions and solutions, as well as giving constructive feedback to the staff (Ogbonnaya, 2019; Baker et al., 2018). Housekeeping management could have weekly meetings to gather information from staff regarding challenges encountered in the daily executions of duties and to share any new ideas or innovations, or solutions to issues. This platform could also be used to give feedback to staff regarding their work on where improvements might be necessary. Daily pre-briefings could also be conducted to make housekeeping employees aware of any special requests by guests and be reminded of the importance of meeting these customer needs. They could also be briefed on current information and events relevant to the hotel's settings. This will enable staff members to be knowledgeable and promptly answer any questions guests might have.
- Management support must also come in the form of creating a comfortable work environment within the housekeeping department by promoting mental and physical body health. Workshops or programmes in assisting employees with regard to mental health could be implemented. Opportunities for growth and self-development could also be included. For instance, basic computer skills could be offered to housekeeping attendants. Short courses on leadership-skills short courses could be offered to enthusiastic employees showing potential in supervisory abilities/skills. To ease the notion of housekeeping work being inferior, motivational talks could be arranged for staff.
- Comprehensive service quality research is vital (Klimecka-Tatar & Ingaldi, 2020:766); therefore, the study recommends that the hotel create a group designated to manage service quality within the housekeeping department. This service quality team should conduct research on customer needs, expectations that were met, and strategies that were employed to meet these expectations to

contribute towards customer satisfaction.

- Young and Gavade (2018:75-80) conducted a research study on using hospitality employee comments to translate emotional insights. The comments of front- and back-of-house employees were used to gather causes for decreased levels of guest satisfaction ratings at these resorts. The comments were on satisfaction with the properties as well as on satisfaction with their supervisors. The findings of the comments were then analysed and solutions to improve on guest satisfaction levels of these group of resorts were identified. It is therefore suggested that the comments below, stipulated by participants of this study, be considered when planning how to improve processes and procedures within the housekeeping departments. The suggested service quality research group/team could adopt this strategy of using comments to the benefit of improving service quality delivery in the housekeeping departments.

Participant comments:

“I wish the hotel can upgrade and do things perfectly and all departments work together and stay strongly”; “The customers always complain”; and “I think the department should work hand in hand with the management so that we can take the business to the next level”.

In conclusion, the following list adopted from Chandrasekar (2011:5-7) is used to summarise the recommendations above. The list could be used by housekeeping departments to ensure a harmonious and performance-driven department to improve and ensure service quality delivery.

- Set goals – Involving employees when establishing goals and performance measures.
- Define processes – Clearly documented, as well as communicated expectations from employees by management.
- Role congruency – The responsibilities of the employees should be clear and coherent with what is expected in performance.
- Provide performance feedback – Positive feedback on what the employee is

doing well, as well as what is lacking to improve on, is detrimental to performing well in a job.

- Provide job aids – These are guidelines, such as guestroom checklists, steps to clean the bathroom, etc., to assist employees in ensuring they do the job correctly and to minimise mistakes.
- Avail opportunities to apply – The department should allow employees to implement new ideas or skills learned through training.
- Ensure supervisor support – It should be ensured that employees are supplied with all the necessary tools, afforded training and motivated to conduct their work properly will ensure better engagement and quality of work.
- Mentoring – Well-experienced employees can be identified to advise and support new employees. This assists in growth within a role.
- Stipulate workplace incentives – Informal and formal reward structures can be implemented by management within housekeeping departments to motivate employees.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study only focused on 3-, 4- and 5-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein and therefore the findings are geographically bound. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised to all other three-, four- and five-star hotels in the Free State or South Africa; therefore, further research is necessary for other areas. It would be interesting to learn how employees of housekeeping departments of different hotels in geographical areas perceive service quality.

The reluctance of participation in the study by other hotels was another limitation. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the number of employees in the hospitality industry, and therefore had a direct impact on the number of participants in this study. In addition, the fact that the researcher was not allowed on the hotel premises due to COVID-19 can be seen as a limitation.

6.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Four suggestions are proposed.

- Firstly, a similar study with a larger sample size from housekeeping departments at hotels in other provinces should be conducted to compare with the current study and to generalise results/findings/recommendations to a larger population. The study could also focus on individual grades of hotels, such as only 5-star-graded or only 3-star-graded hotels.
- Tangible dimensions featured in several previous research studies as a major predictor in customer satisfaction, or as one of the vital service quality dimensions; therefore, an in-depth investigation into Free State hospitality tangibles and service quality could be conducted.
- Interrelatedness between service quality and employee significant factors (such as age, tenure, level of education, employee satisfaction, etc.) at Bloemfontein hotels could be investigated to determine which of the factors are effective in improved service quality delivery or connect.
- Finally, a qualitative methodology version of this study should be conducted to evaluate the employees' perceptions of housekeeping departments.

6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter concluded the study by summarising the findings and furnishing recommendations to enhance the service quality of the housekeeping departments of selected three to five-star-graded hotels in Bloemfontein. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research were also stated in this chapter.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT THE STUDY



FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT
The Hotel School

The General Manager

(Address of the Hotel)

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT THE

_____ HOTEL

I am a Junior Lecturer at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) and also studying towards completing my Master of Management Sciences in Tourism and Hospitality Management. I have identified a need to conduct a research study on **Employee Perceptions of Service Quality Delivery in the Housekeeping Departments of selected 3, 4 and 5 star graded hotels in Bloemfontein.**

The desired outcome of this study is to identify housekeeping employee perceptions of service quality, as well as associated challenges, and make positive contribution towards improving the delivery of service within these departments.

Herewith, I kindly request your permission to conduct a study at your establishment. For this study to be of value, it must be conducted at establishments that are classified as a formal hotel. Your institution has a housekeeping department, offers a minimum of 10 rooms, with full or limited service to guests, has a reception area and a dining facility. This classifies your establishment as a *formal hotel*. For this reason, your establishment is the perfect establishment to be part of this study.

Should you be willing to participate in the study, a self-administered questionnaire, consisting out of three sections will be distributed to your housekeeping staff members. Section one will collect demographic information of the employees, such as gender, age, position and practical work experience in the tourism and hospitality industry. Section two will measure the employees' perceptions of service quality using the SERVQUAL model, Likert scale of 1 to 4; 1 being strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree and 4 being strongly agree.

The questionnaires will be hand delivered by the researcher, who will be available for any assistance required by your employees. The questionnaire will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Data will be collected from July 2021, at your most convenient times. Please note that participation is voluntary, and the rights of participants will be protected; anonymity shall be maintained.

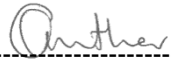
The results of the study will be made available to all hotels involved in this study.
Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely



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APPENDIX B: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



FACULTY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE – [FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES]

RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 12 February 2021

This is to confirm that:

Applicant's Name	Rosemary P. Mosikatsana
Supervisor Name for Student Project (where applicable)	Dr D Crowther & Dr L Coughlan
Level of Qualification for Student Project (where applicable)	Master or Management Sciences: Tourism & Hospitality Management
Title of research project	Employee perceptions of service quality and associated challenges in the housekeeping departments of 3, 4 and 5 star graded hotels in Bloemfontein.

Ethical clearance has been provided by the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee in view of the CUT Research Ethics and Integrity Framework, 2016 with reference number **FMSEC11/19**

The following special conditions were set:

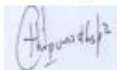
None

Specific conditions

The following specific conditions apply:

1. _____ NA _____
2. _____ NA _____
3. _____ NA _____

We wish you success with your research project.



Professor C. Chipunza
(FRIC Chairperson)

APPENDIX C: SERVQUAL QUESTIONNAIRE



EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY DELIVERY IN THE HOUSEKEEPING DEPARTMENTS OF SELECTED GRADED HOTELS IN BLOEMFONTEIN

Dear participant

Thank you for your co-operation in accepting to complete this questionnaire. It will take a maximum of 20 minutes to complete. This survey is for research purposes only, and confidentiality is guaranteed. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. Feedback on the findings of this study will be provided to every participating hotel. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important for us to learn your opinions.

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact the Researcher and Study leaders specified below:

Researcher: Palesa Mosikatsana at rmosikatsana@cut.ac.za

Study Leader: Dr Johan Van Zyl at jvanzyl@cut.ac.za

Co-Study Leader: Dr Dalene Crowther at dcrowthe@cut.ac.za

Thank you very much for your time and support. Kindly mark your choice with an **X**:

Section 1

Demographics Details:

Please indicate your gender

Male

Female

Please indicate your age

18- 24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

Over 64

Please indicate your racial group

Black

White

Coloured

Indian

Asian

Other

Please indicate your education level

No schooling

Primary school

High school

College

University

Postgraduate

Please write name of Hotel

(Please Print)

Please indicate your employment status

- Casual worker Contract worker Fixed contract worker Permanent worker

Indicate years of employment

- Below 12 months 1 to 4 years 5 to 9 years 10-20 Above 20 years

Please indicate your current position

- Housekeeping management (Executives, Heads, and Supervisors) Room attendant

- Horticulturist (Head Gardener, Gardener, florist) Tailor/Upholster Maintenance

Section 2

Servqual Model:

Expectations Evaluate the department as an employee, by indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.				Please read the attributes below and mark your choices with an X for your expectations and perceptions:	Perceptions Now that you have evaluated the department as an employee. How would you rate the services offered within the department?			
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Attributes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When the department promises to do something within a certain timeframe, they do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department shows sincere interest in solving problems raised by customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department is dependable to perform services the first time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department provides services at the time promised	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department can provide guests with correct information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department informs customers exactly when service will be performed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department provides prompt services to customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department is always willing to help customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department is never too busy to assist customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department can be trusted by customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department's staff is polite to customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department receives enough support from management to do the job well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 2

Servqual Model:

Expectations Evaluate the department as an employee, by indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.				Please read the attributes below and mark your choices with an X for your expectations and perceptions:	Perceptions Now that you have evaluated the department as an employee. How would you rate the services offered within the department?			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Customers' behaviour inspire confidence in the department's staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department gives individual attention to customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department has customers' best interest at heart	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department understands the needs of customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department's working hours are convenient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The department equipment is up to date	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The appearance of the workplace facilities is attractive/visually appealing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The staff in the department is neat and well-dressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The work environment in the department is comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Kindly use the space provided below for any comments
