

**EVALUATION OF QUALITY ADMINISTRATIVE  
PRACTICES IN THREE SELECTED TECHNICAL AND  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
COLLEGES IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

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## DECLARATION

I, Nomzamo Monica Mpanza, declare that this dissertation is my original work and all information cited from published or unpublished works have been acknowledge. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for a Master of Management Sciences in Administration and Information Management. This work has not been submitted in any form for another Degree at any University or Institution of Higher Learning.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation evaluates the quality of administrative practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, situated in the Durban area. TVET Colleges, formerly known as Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in South Africa, have undergone numerous changes since 1994. The South African government has recognized the sharp increase in unemployment, particularly among the youth of the country. There is a dearth of trained employees possessing a certain skills set required in the South African vocational industry and the government has identified TVET colleges as the panacea to address this skills shortage. Student satisfaction is important in higher education as it influences effective learning.

This study adopted a mixed methods approach involving a set of questionnaires administered to students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrative clerks and administrative managers. A stratified sampling technique was used when collecting data from staff and a convenience sample was applied when collecting data from students. A SERVQUAL theoretical framework was employed in this study; this model explains the students' perceptions and expectations in evaluation of administrative practices which have been used to measure service quality in an administrative service context.

The result of the research indicated great importance for all TVET colleges to implement an appropriate set of processes for the administrative practices and to continuously review and refine the application system (COLTECH) being used to capture academic information for students, and the lack of support to the administrative clerks in dealing with all students' enquiries expeditiously. Following an in-depth analysis of the results, this study recommends more consultation with students regarding administrative practices; flexibility in accessing academic information on time; a high level of communication in any enquiries; and proper monitoring of the application system (COLTECH). Administrative clerks should be authorised to rectify errors as soon as possible; continuous training; workshops and the COLTECH application system should be continuously upgraded.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

DHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT:	Durban University of Technology
FET:	Further Education and Training
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
IREC:	Institutional Research Ethics Committee
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
NCV:	National Certificate (Vocational)
SPSS:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

## **CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Government has realized the plight of many jobless youth. The lack of trained workers with certain scarce skills has, therefore, come to light in the world of work. TVET colleges have the potential to answer this need. Non-academic factors often outweigh academic factors in their impact on student success and retention. Often, these factors are outside the loci of control of students and they depend on the effectiveness and efficiency of institutional systems, procedures and processes (Fryer, 2014:4).

Service quality ranges from business to education, as many higher education institutions have been stimulated and influenced by service quality. Teaching and administrative support functions focus on the customer as an essential principle of service quality. Customers for the service of a higher education institution fall into five groups, viz., students, employees, government and the public sector, and industry and wider community (Lekhanya, 2014:299).

Technical Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVET) are currently using a software application called COLTECH to capture academic information of all students. Access to the application software is restricted to administrative clerks of TVET colleges. The application software is closely monitored by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Academic information is captured by administrative clerks during the registration process. Marks are captured by the administrative clerks during the year for formative and summative assessments.

Administrative practices include capturing registration forms, issuing proof of registration, releasing results, printing progress reports, issuing student cards, issuing deregistration forms, issuing permits for examinations, printing and issuing certificates, administering examinations, issuing examination time tables, capturing marks and assisting in any administrative queries of students.

To evaluate the administrative practices, this study adopted five SERVQUAL dimensions to assess the quality of service, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985; with five dimensions of service quality viz tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

In 2002, KwaZulu-Natal's 24 Technical colleges became nine Further Education and Training (FET) colleges. The aim was to meet the developmental needs of the South African communities and the labour market, thus providing affordable access to education and training at FET colleges (Nzimande, 2015:5).

The underlying objective was to adequately prepare learners for the demand of the workplace or equip them with the necessary skills to make self-employment a viable option. This focus on practical skills training and commitment to developing and training economically active graduates made Further Education and Training (FET) colleges an attractive option for school leavers. Further Education and Training colleges FET were renamed Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) in 2014. Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) in South Africa were identified by the democratically elected government, which came into power in 1994, as one of the institutions that should play a central role in the process of skilling and re-skilling the people of South Africa (Nzimande, 2015:5).

The Department of Higher Education and Training introduced the National Vocational Certificate (NCV) in Further Education and Training colleges in January 2007. The entry requirement for this qualification is Grade 9. However, this qualification has attracted students with grades between Grades 9 and 12. Students enrolling for the NCV qualification have different educational backgrounds and different needs. An appropriate student support system to accommodate these diverse students is imperative for them to enrich opportunities afforded by the college. Once students are conscious of what the college does for them, it will operate effectively and at its maximum level.

The focus of the study is to explore the impact of administrative practices on students. Students are supported at registration, during their studies and at exit level (third year). An early identification of academic support needs is a crucial part of the system to enable students to determine where to find assistance. By the time it comes to the mid-year or final examinations, it is often too late to remedy the situation (Maimane, 2016:1680).

Administrative services can be measured by meeting students' needs in any higher education institution. The administration services department's main focus should be on delivering quality administration services to students. Students evaluate service on almost all activities and indirect support systems as well as considering the process of administrative practices' delivery when receiving a service (Hefer and Cant 2014:4). Student satisfaction is important in the higher education sector due to its role in effective learning. It is essential for student perceptions of the administrative practices to be evaluated and managed by the TVET colleges, because administrative practices and students' satisfaction are important concepts to academic activities. In order to manage improved administrative practices on campuses, institutions should be responsive to students' issues; be efficient; adopt clear communication strategies; and manage conflicts (Sharma, 2016:57).

Education, as a service, is committed to satisfying the educational needs of its clients by creating educational services required by learners and not compelling them to accept existing educational facilities. Diversified educational provision does not guarantee high quality education, but different educational services are in a constant state of competition (Green, 2014:12).

The mandate given to TVET by the government is to equip South African society with the relevant and responsive skills needed by local businesses and industries, especially in the intermediate phase, such as artisans and other vocational skills (Dlamini, 2014:10). The TVET system has to grow substantially to be responsive to changing labour-market and individual needs, and yet be flexible enough to address skills imbalances and shortages. This requires a responsive, properly planned and effective TVET system. A 'big-bang approach' was not an option for this sector (Maimane, 2016:1683).

The ambition to expand numbers and responsibilities of the TVET colleges must take into cognisance the limited resources available in this sub-system. The priority should first be to stabilise the system, while providing clarity about its vision and role in the Post-School Education and Training system. Therefore, a realistic approach is to prioritise the necessary reforms and set out reasonable timelines while improving the quality of education (Nzimande, 2015:8).

The effective and efficient functioning of TVET colleges is pertinent to the development of critical, scarce and intermediate skills for the South African labour market. One of the focus areas of the TVET colleges Act (2006) is quality assurance systems, which include the evaluation of the performance of information systems as a key performance indicator of organisational success (Visser, 2011:3).

According to Nzimande (2015:14) the TVET sector does not offer a solution to these students because it is characterised by limited growth in enrolments and poor throughput rates. The nett effect of this is that access to Post-School Education and Training is limited for school leavers. The few school leavers that access Post-School Education and Training opportunities are not sufficiently prepared for the workplace due to the poor quality of education and training provided (Nzimande, 2015:14). The higher education sector is not an alternative for these students, and those who do make it to universities face challenges which force them to drop out. As a result, the system is not able to produce the number and quality of graduates needed by the economy. About one million young individuals exit the schooling system annually, many of them without achieving a Grade 12 certificate. Half of those who exit the schooling system do so after Grade 11, either because they do not enrol in Grade 12 or they fail Grade 12. However, only a small number of those who leave the schooling system enrol in TVET colleges or have access to any Post-School Education and Training (Nzimande, 2015:15).

The implementation of the TVET system was based on reviews of government documents. The recognition of the quality of education and training, as a decisive means for realizing sustainable development and poverty alleviation, has increased since the 1990s. The concept of quality seems to be slippery. Quality is an inherently



vague concept and continues to be an item of conversation, differing conceptualizations of quality into five discrete but interrelated categories, namely: quality as exceptional, quality as perfection (or consistency), quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation. In transformation, quality of education and training refers to qualitative change in the form of value-added, or, more specifically, to a 'cognitive transcendence' of participants (learners) (Baraki, Negash, and Asfaw, 2016:27).

This involves 'enhancing the participant' in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes and 'empowering the participant' - allowing the participants to have a concept of quality in terms of what they call its constituents: object, standard, subject and values (Baraki, Negash, and Asfaw, 2016:4).

An evaluation of administrative practices can impact on student progress; hence, all academic and personal assessments are captured by administrative clerks. This study's main aim was to evaluate students' perceptions and expectations regarding administrative practices in three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. Previous studies conducted by Collier and Benestock (2009:260), Parasuraman, Valarie, Zeithaml and Berry, (1985), found that education services are often intangible and difficult to measure. Since the outcome is reflected in the transformation of individuals in their knowledge, their characteristics, and their behaviour, the SERVQUAL models measure service quality on the five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions are well suited in measuring service quality in offline services (Collier and Benestock, 2009:260).

In the education sector, service quality has certain features due to the unique components of the sector. In the higher education sector, students are the clients who are to be given a service and whose needs are to be met. Therefore, it is imperative for colleges to identify and deliver what is important to students and how these needs will be satisfied. In the higher education sector, students' experience should be the key issue which performance indicators need to address.

Thus, it becomes important to identify determinants or critical factors of service quality from the standpoint of students who are the primary customers (Anil and Icli, 2014:32).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

According to Anil and Icli (2014:33), a logical and transparent understanding of administration is an important factor influencing satisfaction and academic development. The first contact of the student at any institution is through the admission and registrar's services; so, providing high quality service to students contributes to the positive assessment of the institution. The administrative clerks need to be able to service efficiently, in a friendly manner, have specific working hours and be able to guide the students.

Trained administrative clerks have determined that the initial desire of the students is to be guided and properly advised. It has been shown that administrative practices' quality, though to a lesser extent than factors that are directly related to pedagogic implementation, does act as a predictor of student satisfaction (Anil and Icli 2014:33). Academic literature is replete with information on service quality and measurement of service quality in higher education. In addition, the application of SERVQUAL, as a measuring tool, has been used extensively in determining the gap between perceptions and expectations of service quality in various contexts; service quality is generally evaluated by using student perceptions (Green, 2014:3).

In this study, administrative clerks were found to be the most influencing factor in students' evaluation of administrative practices at TVET colleges. At TVET colleges, students need to write all formative assessments (internal exams) for the summative assessment (external exams) results to be released at the end of each year. In the event of students not writing formative assessments or when marks were not entered on the systems, students' results for summative assessments are withheld by the Department of Higher Education, until evidence of formative assessments is given. This is a critical challenge students are experiencing as results are not released at the end of the year because the student's status shows that the student did not write the formative assessment.

To address this challenge, lecturers need to submit a portfolio of evidence (POE) as a proof of formative assessments. It normally takes time for the DHET to respond after the POE is sent and a student needs to wait, as the student cannot register for the following level without the feedback from the DHET. It also becomes a challenge for students to explain their status at home because parents expect results at the end of the year. Administrative clerks need to be client-centred or client-focused and provide effective communication. Hence, students at TVET colleges experience challenges regarding the capturing of inaccurate academic information by the administrative clerks. Communication needs to be a pleasurable experience in which trained staff adopt a friendly, helpful attitude and provide a welcoming environment (Anil and Icli 2014:33).

The National Vocation Certificate has a minimum duration of three (3) years; at the completion of each year, a certificate is issued. One of the challenges experienced by students is that of certificates given to students by the college with wrong personal information, i.e., first names, last names and identity numbers are incorrect, because of some error in the academic information captured for the student on the system. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study has not been previously undertaken.

#### **1.4 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the quality of administrative practices rendered to students, as well as the challenges experienced by administrative clerks in three TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, using the SERVQUAL models to measure service quality on the five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions are well suited to measuring service quality in offline services (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). The education, training and innovation system caters for different needs and produces highly skilled individuals. The graduates of South Africa's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and Universities of Technology, have the skills and knowledge to meet the present and future needs of the economy and society (Nzimande, 2015:9).

According to Murtin (2013:6) educational attainment has increased rapidly in South Africa in comparison with other emerging countries, as the country exhibits nearly full enrolment in primary and secondary schooling as well as a rapid expansion in pre-primary schooling, and in tertiary education, to a lesser extent, the education system remains largely dual as long-lasting consequences of apartheid have not yet been suppressed. In particular, the quality of education is still very low for a large fraction of the Black African population, as shown by a number of regional and international surveys of pupil performance at school (Murtin, 2013:6).

Good administrative practices can lead to quality service that fully meets the expectations and requirements of the users. Providing appropriate information to the right user at the right time and in the required form is maintaining quality by means of satisfying the query (Sohail and Raza, 2012:3). Therefore, the DHET's focus and priority is to ensure that colleges are strengthened to become institutions of choice for training artisans and producing other mid-level skills (Nzimande, 2015:9).

Government came to the realisation that confronting TVET colleges' developmental challenges would require a single integrated, though diverse, post-school education and training system that facilitated articulation between its different components. Radical improvements in the quality of education and training are needed in order to contribute to the lives of individuals, the developmental needs of the economy and to the broader society. The DHET is responsible for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and Universities of Technology. The core mandate of the Department of Higher Education and Training is aimed at transforming the education system to overcome the legacy of apartheid and colonialism and to confront racial, gender, class and other forms of inequality (Nzimande, 2015:10).

## **1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate administrative practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVET) in KwaZulu-Natal. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were addressed:

- To determine the expectations and perceptions of students regarding administrative practices;
- To identify the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and staff using strategies identified by SERVQUAL gaps;
- To identify the challenges experienced by administrative clerks in delivering efficient administrative practices; and
- To investigate the system support provided by the administrative managers to the administrative clerks in delivering accurate academic information for students.

In order to achieve aims and objectives the following questions will be addressed:

- What are the expectations of students regarding administrative practices?
- What are the perceptions of students regarding administrative practices?
- What are the challenges experienced by administrative clerks in rendering administrative practices in these colleges?
- What is the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and administrative clerks?
- What is the support given to administrative clerks in delivering quality administrative practices to students by administrative managers?

It is envisaged that the findings and recommendations of this study will contribute to the provision of improved administrative practices at both local and national TVET colleges. Providing services with good quality and reasonable prices at an advanced level, will lead organizations and businesses to competitive advantages continually, while producing and providing distinctive services will increase customers' loyalty. Service quality is a kind of judgment; customers judge it according to their understanding of the process of service delivery; they compare their expectations with the services they received (Fariba, Karam and Iraj, 2013:114).

## 1.6 DELIMITATIONS

First- and second-year students were not part of this research since they were new to the colleges and had less experience of administration services. Due to time and financial constraints, the study was restricted to three TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal.

## 1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

**Chapter One: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY.** This chapter consisted of an introduction, followed by the background to the research. A problem statement was then defined. The chapter proceeded to highlight the significance of the study and how it will be a beneficial body of knowledge. The chapter also outlined the aim and objectives of the study.

**Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW.** This chapter contains a critical review of the relevant literature pertaining to the topic. The chapter presents and reviews literature on quality administrative practices, as well as other literature relevant to evaluation of administrative practices and service quality in the higher education sector.

**Chapter Three: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.** This chapter focuses on the methodology applied in the study. The data collection strategy used for the study is then introduced. The population and sample and the sampling strategy are also detailed. Furthermore, the collection of data is discussed, including the instrument used to collect data, the capturing of data and the manner in which data are analysed and presented.

**Chapter Four: RESEARCH FINDINGS.** This chapter presents the findings of the study conducted. It provides a detailed analysis of the data through an interpretation of the results of the survey and interview sessions. The quantitative data are also displayed in tabular and graphic forms.

**Chapter Five: DISCUSSION OF MAIN RESULTS.** This chapter discusses all data gathered in the research process, according to the aim and objectives of this study.

**Chapter Six: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.** The final chapter of the dissertation presents the conclusions, which directly address the objectives set for the study. Recommendations are given based on these key findings and conclusions are drawn. The chapter is concluded by providing recommendations of important areas for future research.

## **1.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided a brief history of TVET colleges and the nature of administrative practices offered at TVET colleges. The evaluation of administrative practices was reviewed on the perceptions and expectations of students; the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and staff using strategies identified by SERVQUAL gaps; the challenges faced by administrative clerks in delivering good administrative practices; and the system support provided by the administrative managers to the administrative clerks in delivering accurate academic information for students in three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. The next chapter reviews the literature pertaining to the main concepts of evaluation of administrative practices.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter two focuses on a review of appropriate literature on service quality relating to administrative practices. The chapter focuses on the review of students' perceptions and expectations in administrative practices being offered to students; to identify the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and administrative staff using strategies identified by SERVQUAL. Students' expectations and students' satisfaction are considered by using five SERVQUAL service quality dimensions to evaluate administrative practices.

The literature shows that service quality, as a factor, can influence the return on investment and customer loyalty to any organisation. This review includes theories, concepts, models and factors of students' satisfaction with administrative practices. In general, satisfaction is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from the performance of a service in relation to expectations (Sohail and Raza, 2012:3).

Further Education and Training colleges (FET) in South Africa were identified by the democratically-elected government, which came into power in 1994, as one of the institutions that should play a central role in the process of skilling and re-skilling of the people of South Africa. Further Education and Training colleges (FET) were renamed Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVET) in 2014. The mandate given to TVET by the government was to equip South African society with the relevant and responsive skills needed by local businesses and industries, especially in the intermediate phase, such as artisan and other vocational skills. TVET colleges in South Africa are committed to improving student performance (Nzimande, 2015:3).

### **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is SERVQUAL (Service Quality) with specific reference to the RATER aspect.



RATER measures the five dimensions of service quality, viz., reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is derived from experience with a service encounter and the comparison of that experience to a given standard. Most managers today understand that, to make a substantial impact on organizational service quality, frontline workers and customers need to be the centre of management's concern. Parasuraman, Valarie, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) originally proposed ten dimensions of service quality with five basic gaps to be analysed - tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, and understanding the consumer. Their research was later refined, leading to the development of the SERVQUAL scale, which measures customers' perceptions of service quality. The original ten dimensions were later condensed into the following five:

- Tangibles: Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials;
- Reliability: Ability to dependably and accurately perform the promised service;
- Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
- Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence; and
- Empathy: Caring, individualized attention that the firm provides for its customers (Parasuraman, Valarie, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985)

However, the SERVQUAL model in this study supplied detailed information relating to perceptions and expectations of students with regard to administrative practices; levels of performance as seen by the students from administrative staff; recommendations of students; and personal impressions from administrative staff in relation to students' satisfaction and perceptions. The basic functions of higher education institutions include administrative practices and education (Lekhanya, 2014:299).

## 2.3 DEFINING SERVICE QUALITY

It may seem that the SERVQUAL model of evaluating service quality is not a perfect solution and the criticisms related to the theory are based on the Gap model. The methodology related to applying the SERVQUAL instrument of research and the model's dimensionality and validity have been noted. It still remains one of the most influential research instruments in researching service quality. Despite its numerous critics, the SERVQUAL instrument still continues to appeal to both academics and practitioners, irrespective of legitimate concerns about the validity of the scale (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:40).

A study conducted by Manuel (2008:51) concludes that customer satisfaction is the key ingredient in the success of any business. This is the most important factor that creates loyal customers. Presently, organisations are attempting to obtain increased customer satisfaction by focusing on the quality of their products and the service provided. Students were identified as customers of higher education institutions. Customer service can be described as the totality of what the organisation does to add value to its products and services in the eyes of the customer. Quality is described as the measurement of how well the product or service of the organisation conforms to the customers' wants and expectations. Another way to look at this issue is to say that quality is the ability of the organisation to meet or exceed customer expectations (Manuel, 2008:53).

Anil and Icli (2014:31) conclude that quality is increasingly important for the higher education sector to better understand customer expectations and, therefore, to determine service quality. In higher education, the definition of a customer is quite different from the manufacturing or general services since groups such as students, employers, academic staff, the government and families are all customers of the same education system with a diversity of requirements (Anil and Icli, 2014:32). Customers can influence the quality of service received by others – either by enhancing or detracting from other customers' experiences. The final measure of quality customer service is simply how the customer perceives it. Perceptions are considered relative to expectations.

Customers perceive service in terms of the quality of the service they receive and whether or not they are satisfied with their experiences (Anil and Icli, 2014:32). The perceptions that customers form are vital to a service organisation, as the services they offer are intangible and sales rely heavily on a positive perception. Perception becomes an influential factor when comparing customers' satisfaction with the service that is provided to them. In the context of this study, a possible example could be students at a university developing a negative perception of service quality when services rendered by the institution fall below their expectations, thereby creating dissatisfaction (Manuel, 2008:32).

Customer satisfaction is influenced by specific product or service features and perceptions of quality. Satisfaction is also influenced by customers' emotional responses, their attributions, and their perceptions of equity (Manuel, 2008:2). Education services are often intangible and difficult to measure, since the outcome is reflected in the transformation of individuals in their knowledge, their characteristics, and their behaviour (Collier and Benestock, 2009:3).

The SERVQUAL model measures service quality on the five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions are well suited to measuring service quality in offline services. In order to meet students' needs and to get their share from the highly competitive market, universities and colleges need to increase the quality of the service they offer and measure satisfaction, which is a result of quality. Therefore, it is important to clearly define the dimensions of service quality leading to satisfaction in accordance with the field qualifications (Anil and Icli 2014:31). In this way, TVET colleges will be able to increase administrative practices quality and, thus, students' satisfaction while eliminating dissatisfaction (Anil and Icli 2014:31).

## **2.4 UNDERSTANDING SERVICE QUALITY**

SERVQUAL uses a scale to rate service expectations and performance by asking customers a set of questions on a number of attributes that reflect the five dimensions of perceived quality, placing emphasis on the views and perceptions of customers in assessing service quality.

There is a substantial body of evidence in higher education literature suggesting that the SERVQUAL instrument is effective in measuring service quality in the higher education environment, and is especially useful in offering guidance for changing shortcomings to strengths (Porral and Mangin, 2013:12).

According to Mukumbareza (2014:8), a general definition of service quality is the direction and level of consistency between customers' perceptions and expectations. Service quality can also be defined as the difference between customers' expectations for service performance prior to a service encounter and their perception of the service received. Perceived service quality is, therefore, the gap between perceptions and expectations of a customer. In the education sector, service quality has distinctive features due to the unique qualifications of the sector. In the higher education sector, students are the clients who are to be given a service and whose needs are to be met.

Therefore, it is imperative for TVET colleges to identify and deliver what is important to students and how they will be satisfied. In higher education, students' experiences should be the key issue for addressing performance indicators. Thus, it becomes important to identify determinants or critical factors of service quality from the standpoint of students being the primary customer (Anil and Icli, 2014:33).

## **2.5 ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE QUALITY**

According to the study conducted by Green (2006:21), an institution has a distinct identity and a meaningful role to play in society. Any higher learning institution, in its entirety, is a system comprising of many sub-systems. The education sector stakeholders represent various systems, viz., students, parents, government, donors, and the public, etc. It is the interaction of these systems that is critical for the successful measure of service quality (Green, 2009:21). Green (2009:22) observes that the definition of services encompasses a wide range of services: for external and internal customers; personal and impersonal; repetitive and non-repetitive; long-term and short-term; customized, semi-customized, and non-customized services; automated, IT-reliant, and non-automated services; and those with varying degrees of self-service responsibilities.

### **2.5.1 TANGIBLES**

For the purpose of this study, therefore, SERVQUAL was used as the theoretical framework with its five generic service-quality dimensions. Tangibles (measured by three items) are: the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, and personnel (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). This study seeks to determine students' expectations and perceptions of the administrative practices being offered by the colleges, because, at any education institution, information is vast - from student records to information kept by academic and administrative staff. Consequently, a service quality model, with its five dimensions, will be useful when evaluating the perception and perceived administrative practices to students (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

Anil and Icli (2014:33) conclude that service quality differs from the organisation's perspective, and means establishing requirements and specifications. Once established, the quality goal is based primarily on satisfying customers' needs. From the customers' perspective, service quality means how well the goods/services provided by the organization meet or exceed customer expectations. Service quality can thus be defined as the difference between customers' expectations of service and perceived service. If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and, therefore, customer dissatisfaction occurs.

### **2.5.2 RELIABILITY**

Reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. SERVQUAL is based on the underlying premise that service quality can be defined as the extent to which a service meets or exceeds customers' needs or expectations (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:39). Therefore, service quality can be operationally defined as the difference between the customer's expectations of service and perceptions of actual service delivery. The implementation of administrative practices means a change from an inner process-oriented view to a customer-oriented interactive approach. It is the intersection between the public and the service of customers in a market-oriented environment (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:39).

Students are regarded as customers at the colleges. The service quality of education in a business institute is of immense importance, especially due to the increase in competition between the business institutes. TVETs should become more student-oriented rather than more customer-service oriented. Customer expectations may be described as the desires or wants of the consumer. The crux is that customer expectations are what the customer expects from the organisation and its range of product or services, i.e., what customers feel the organisation should offer them. These expectations are, in most instances, different from what the customer receives in real-life situations from the organisation. What is important here is to focus on the customers' perceptions, rather than on the reality of performance strengths (Porrall *et al.*, 2013:615).

The role of service quality education has received increasing attention during the last few decades. In the services context, quality could be defined as a 'measure of how well the service level delivered matches the customers' expectations'. Customers perceive services in terms of the quality of service provided and the satisfaction level attained. These two concepts - service quality and customer satisfaction - are the focus of attention of organisations because they want to quantify (measure) them. The reason for the focus on quality of service and customer satisfaction is the belief that organisations can differentiate themselves by providing better service quality and overall customer satisfaction. These various factors cannot be optimized in isolation but must be combined to produce the concept of good administrative practices (Green, 2014:15).

Customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that function as standards or reference points against which performance is judged. Customers' expectations about what constitutes good service vary from one business to another and vary in relation to differently positioned service providers in the same industry. In the context of this study, a service provided by public TVET colleges that fails to meet the expectations of a student may be considered poor quality by that particular student, while another student, who did not have such high expectations, might consider the service to be of high quality. It is, therefore, important for an organization to strive for a service quality orientation to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors (Mukumbareza, 2014:15).

However, understanding the expectations of customers is not an easy task, because often consumers either do not really know what they want, or do not say directly what they want. This is all the more reason to deploy a valid instrument such as SERVQUAL to focus on capturing the functional aspects of quality management in the service sectors (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:4).

### **2.5.3 RESPONSIVENESS**

Responsiveness can be defined as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. SERVQUAL strongly emphasises the process of service delivery rather than the outcomes or end result of the service encounter (Anil and Icli 2014:33). From an operational perspective, consumers evaluate service quality on the basis of both standards and expectations and it is basically impossible to capture the variation of each service quality dimension by four or five items (Anil and Icli 2014:33).

There has to be a willingness to assist customers and to provide prompt service on a continuous basis. Sometimes, this service may take place out of normal operating hours. This dimension focuses on attentiveness and willingness in dealing with customer requests, queries and prompt complaint resolution. Responsiveness and good quality information services are about helping users define and satisfy their information needs, building their confidence in using information retrieval systems and making the whole activity of administrative practices a pleasurable experience (Anil and Icli, 2014:33).

The increases in the dropout rate and low throughput rate, at both public and private institutions of higher learning in South Africa, are a big concern among local nationals and have created interest among scholarly researchers (Anil and Icli 2014:34). There are many questions that require answers with regard to the quality of service that students receive at the universities, as many stakeholders do not understand customer-service orientation of South African universities. Responsiveness is communicated to customers by the length of time they have to wait for assistance or attention to their problems (Anil and Icli, 2014:34).

Responsiveness captures the notion of flexibility and ability to customize the service to the customers' needs (Anil and Icli, 2014:34). It is important that the service organization examines the process of service delivery from the customers' point of view, rather than the company's point of view. For example, higher education students' standard for prompt service delivery may differ significantly from management's standards at the institution. Examples of responsiveness in the context of this study would include university employees telling students exactly when services will be performed, and giving prompt service to students as well as being willing to help students when required to do so (Hossein and Ahmad, 2011:240).

#### **2.5.4 ASSURANCE**

Assurance can be defined as the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence, The institutions of higher learning in South Africa are faced with many challenges, such as increased competition, lack of support from key constituencies, an increase in the size and diversity of the student population, and dealing with changing technology (Visser, Van Biljon and Herselman, 2013:8).

In addition, there are increased calls for accountability, a higher demand for quality by all the stakeholders involved, more responsibility for research and teaching, and a greater emphasis on efficient and effective management. Considering the competitive environment, there is a need for institutions to plan strategies that will differentiate them from each other. This can be achieved through the delivery of exceptional service quality. In today's competitive world, institutions put customers at the centre of their attention, and their customers' loyalty is the institution's key to earning a competitive advantage (Visser, Van and Herselman, 2013:8).

Student satisfaction and service quality attributes, such as responsiveness, competence, credibility and communication, are significant determinants of service quality for business institutes/universities (Hossein and Ahmad, 2011:240).



The most basic distinguishing characteristic of services is intangibility, because services are performances or actions rather than objects; they cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the same manner that one can sense tangible goods. Services are often produced and consumed at the same time, and mass production is difficult. The quality of service and customer satisfaction will be highly dependent on what happens in 'real time', including the actions of employees and the interactions between employees and customers (Hosseini and Ahmad, 2011:240).

Administering service is defined as the difference between users' expectations and perceptions of service performance. Many ways of communication are developed through technology as a means of communication, i.e., technology enables both customers and employees to be more effective in getting and providing service. Through self-service technologies, customers can serve themselves more effectively. The researcher of this study examined the communication channels which were put in place for communicating with students regarding the services rendered inside campus (Visser *et al.*, 2013:2).

### **2.5.5 EMPATHY**

Empathy is the level of caring and individualised attention the firm provides to its customers. Yusuf *et al.*, (2012:3) conclude that the shift to the knowledge economy has brought education in all its forms (pre-school, primary school, secondary school, higher education, vocational training, and adult education) back into focus.

Education has, for years, been a 'commodity' spurning big and small businesses. Now education is big business. Higher education can contribute to the economy. Higher educational institutions that adopt quality culture as their philosophy will strive to achieve excellence in service quality and customer satisfaction.

A comparison of perceptions of service quality between first- and final-year students suggests that perceptions of service quality elements change over a period of study Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:10). Hence, TVET colleges become more student-oriented, student perceptions are higher, educational facilities and student orientation are becoming more important (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:30).

Student satisfaction, consumer satisfaction and service quality continue to attract the attention of researchers and practitioners in a wide variety of disciplines. It is believed that student satisfaction is an important qualitative indicator for higher educational institutes (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:30).

According to Hufford (2013:6), assessment is often equated with evaluation. For education professionals, assessment occurs when a researcher wants to discover what a student knows or can do, while evaluation is used to determine the value of a course or programme, measurement and evaluation of services. Evaluation “consists of the comparison of performance with the objectives of the agency, in order to determine: (a) whether there has been any change in performance for a given time period; (b) if so, whether the change is in the desired direction; and (c) if so, to what extent.” Service and administration can influence a customer’s judgement about the quality of service received. Consumers perceive service quality as stemming from a comparison of what they feel service organisations or departments should offer, with their perceptions of these organisations or departments delivering the service. Perceived service quality is thus viewed as the degree and direction of the discrepancy between the customers’ perceptions and expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

The potential payoff from improved service quality is considerable. Providing excellent service, which should be the goal of every organization, leads to greater efficiency and effectiveness, and a loyal customer base. This indicates that higher education institutions should strive to increase students’ satisfaction by providing the services they really require. Customer satisfaction has an effect on the profitability of nearly all commercial interactions and when customers perceive good service they will return (Ngibe, 2015:30).

According to Reddy (2014:89), gap analysis uses each of the five dimensions within the service delivery organisation. This enables management to develop a plan for improving the way that the services are provided to their customers. To do the gap analysis, the following must be identified in each of the five areas: Future state: the ‘place’ one wants to be to provide exceptional service; Current situation: how one currently provides one’s service; and;

Next actions: how one will move from one's current situation to one's future state. Once the future state and current situation of the organisation are identified, a clear strategy (next actions) must be laid out to progress from the current situation to the proposed future state. Administrative staff must be involved in strategy planning and obtain consistent feedback from clients to assess the changes on any perception of improved services (Reddy, 2014:89).

Measuring service quality is a challenge because client satisfaction is determined by many intangibles. Clients are different and services are delivered according to the interaction between the customer and service provider. Efficient and effective instruments to measure service quality are crucial for service providers to continually improve their levels of service quality. RATER is a modified model of the SERVQUAL instrument which forms the qualities of a service offering from a client's perspective (Reddy, 2014:73).

Higher learning institutions are expected to meet the needs of students concerning administrative practices. Increasing the number of higher education institutions can affect quality and quantity in education if not well delivered to students. The higher learning institutions are required to provide basic opportunities for potential students. Provision of needs, such as administrative practices, would influence the perceptions towards the institution. The quality of services became the focus of interest in the 1980s (Lekhanya, 2014:300).

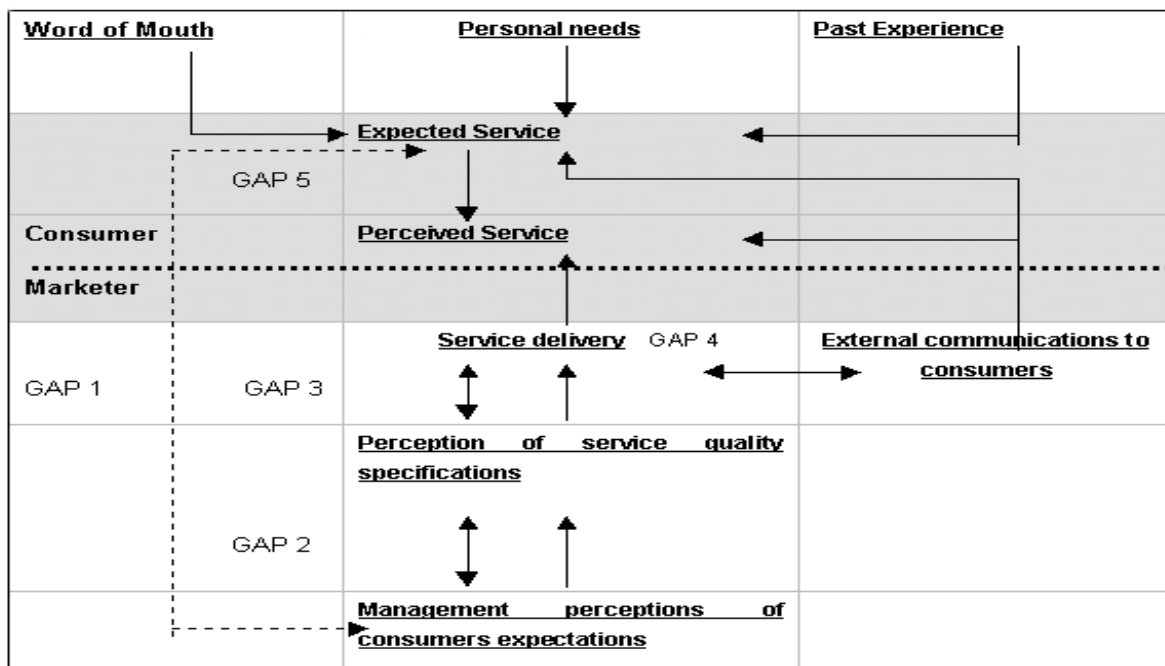
Therefore, this study seeks to determine expectations and perceptions regarding administrative practices being offered to students in three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal and encourages improvement in gaps that may exist. Due to the vast global economic reform, community entities have brought about widespread transformation to their economic activities, ranging from public service productions to service operations, to create greater efficiency and productivity as well as to reduce administrative costs just like in the private sector. Various researchers hold different perceptions on the dimensions of service quality. Perceived service quality has two underlying dimensions, namely, functional and technical quality. Functional quality relates to the manner in which the service is delivered and technical quality involves what the consumer is actually receiving from the service (Klerk and Dye 2015:163).

According to the study conducted by Yusuf, Hassan, Rahman and Ghouri (2012:36) the following gaps were identified:

- The knowledge gap: the difference between what customers expect of a service and what management perceives the customers expect;
- The standards gap: the difference between what management perceives customers expect and the standards set for service delivery;
- The delivery gap: the difference between the standards set for service delivery and the actual quality of service delivery;
- The communication gap: the difference between the actual quality of service delivered and the quality of service described in the organization’s external communications; and
- The service gap: the perceived performance and expectations, which is the function of gap 1.

Further to customer service quality gap analysis, Figure 1.1 on the GAP Model of Service Quality is illustrated below:

**Figure 1.1: GAP Model of Service Quality**



**Source:** Parasuraman, Valarie, Zeithaml and Berry (1985:41).

Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985) concluded that 'Gap analyses' are important for identifying discrepancies between the service provider's perceptions of service quality dimensions and the clients' perceptions of those dimensions. Hence, the aim of this study was to investigate the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and administrative staff using strategies identified by SERVQUAL gaps.

Service quality ranges from business to education, as many higher education institutions have been stimulated and influenced by service quality, both for teaching and administrative support functions. Focusing on the customer is an essential principle of service quality, and customers of higher education institutions fall into five groups: students, employees, government and the public sector, industry and the wider community (Lekhanya, 2014:300). A study, conducted by Abdullah and Zamhari (2013:3), conclude that meeting the challenges of customers' rising demands in the public sector is not a new dilemma.

The recent impacts of changing technology in the services industry, as well as the government's new policies, resulted in drastic changes in the management of public institutions (Nzimande, 2015:18). To date, numerous issues regarding service delivery failure provided by these institutions were filed by the general public. Service quality conforms to customer specifications where customers assess the quality of a service by comparing what they want or expect to what they actually get or perceive they are getting (Nzimande, 2015:18).

## **2.6 EDUCATION AS A SERVICE**

According to the study conducted by Green (2009:27), education is a service directly impacted on by the provider, and it is only as effective or inadequate as the quality of both the academic and non-academic services. Higher education institutions are increasingly placing greater emphasis on meeting students' expectations and needs. The importance of service quality in higher education institutions is widely acknowledged by many practitioners and academics worldwide, yet there seems to be limited research on service quality in higher education institutions (HEIs), especially TVET colleges (Klerk and Dye, 2015:163).

It is important to consider student academic support services and academic growth in an effective service quality model. Such a framework of quality values in higher education may include various academic inputs such as course design, course marketing, student recruitment, induction, course delivery, course contents and assessment monitoring. Such values indicate that students are increasingly being viewed as clients to whom education services are provided. Students' satisfaction can be seen as an indicator of success in the implementation of quality academic programmes. There is also a relationship between various academic quality dimensions and students' satisfaction (Jager and Jan, 2016:361).

According to Green (2009:26), the main goal of education today is to provide individuals with multifaceted training, and principally with knowledge and skills for creative activities, for adapting to the changes in the natural and social environment and for lifelong learning. Subsequently, the main objective of modern education is to offer individuals the kind of education that will allow them to realise themselves.

This means that education must offer learners every possibility of realising their educational needs. Education, as a service, possesses certain features which distinguishes it from the education system. It offers more diversified contents, modes, forms and methods of learning and teaching. Education, as a service, is committed to satisfying the educational needs of its clients by creating education services required by learners and not limiting them to accept existing educational facilities (Green, 2009:28).

Quality education should be consistent with the needs and objectives of major stakeholders (students, parents, employees, employers and government). In tertiary education, administrative practices are measured as an essential strategy for success in higher education (Akhlaghi and Akhlaghi, 2012:5286). Hence, this study considered the five sub-dimensions of service delivery which influence a customer's judgment about the quality of service received in order to evaluate the best administrative practices offered at three selected TVET colleges in KZN.

## **2.7 HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Higher education (HE) is being driven towards commercial competition imposed by economic forces, resulting from the development of global education markets and the reduction of governmental funds (Porral *et al.*, 2013:603). HE institutions have to be concerned not only with what society values in terms of skills and abilities of their graduates, but also with how their students feel and perceive their education, and the quality of HE throughout educational curricula and administrative processes. Institutions must view students as their primary clients and seek to maximize their satisfaction based on educational services rendered. Quality could be defined as transformation or value added (Porral, Mangin and Corti, 2013:603).

The term quality in higher education refers to the policies, processes and actions through which quality is maintained and developed. Higher education administrators should focus on students' perceptions of educational quality. Service quality in higher education institutions is assessed through the students' perspective. Previous researchers have recognized the importance of the perceived quality from the students' viewpoint, in order to achieve quality enhancement (Porral, Mangin and Corti, 2013:603).

The South African education sector has been haunted by the spirit of change and transformation from the apartheid-influenced education system to one that will represent the demographic make-up of the country (Klerk and Dye, 2015:165). The higher education sector has had various policies promulgated, amended and re-amended in order to change the landscape. The policies regarding student satisfaction are important in higher education because of its role in competing for a high quality of students and in the retention of students. It is also important for the referral of prospective students and often receives prominence in strategic mission statements and objectives (Klerk and Dye, 2015:165).

## **2.8 STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS**

The study conducted by Mukumbareza (2014:46) evaluated citizens' satisfaction with the quality of e-government information services provided by the Southern African

Development Community. The study by Mukumbareza (2014:46) relates to the aim and objective of this study; determining students' expectations and perceptions of administrative practices.

Hence, this study seeks to evaluate the administrative practices in three selected TVET colleges in KZN. Students' confidence in their expectations with regard to a service should definitely have a desirable impact on satisfaction. Students' expectation proxies considered in this study are: Meeting personal needs – this measures the expectations of students of the college services to meet their administrative needs when doing a transaction; Reliability – this measures students' expectations of administrative practices services consistently producing, meeting and exceeding service specifications and also the availability of the services; and Overall quality – this determines the students' expectation of administrative practice services to meet the overall quality expected (Karthikeyan and Ramkumar, 2015:249).

Service quality plays a vital role in service delivery by improving the productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction of the organization, as a summary of cognitive and affective reaction to a service incident (Karthikeyan and Ramkumar, 2015:250). Customers always evaluate the services in total and see how well they meet expectations in any higher educational institution, not just by merely providing a service but by ensuring that it is moving towards developing and maintaining mutually long-term relationships with students (Karthikeyan and Ramkumar, 2015:250).

Perceived service quality is the overall evaluation of service quality after students have used college administrative services (Mukumbareza, 2014:46). It measures perceived guidelines, the simplicity of using college services and timely response to students' requests during a service transaction. It evaluates customization and reliability of service. Perceived service quality has a positive effect on students' satisfaction (Mukumbareza, 2014:46).



Perceived quality interaction proxies considered in this study are: Response timeliness – this is how fast a service request can be completed and is measured by the speed a task is completed, by response time and execution time; and Ease of use – the usability of the website during students' navigation which reduces customer frustration and results in students' satisfaction (Mukumbareza, 2014:46).

## **2.9 STUDENTS' SATISFACTION**

Students' satisfaction can be measured in terms of how many students are satisfied and how well their expectations are met, evaluating whether the college performance is meeting the ideal administrative practices, fulfilment of expectations and overall students' satisfaction. Students' trust measures the level of experience the students have in relation to the college administrative practices' transaction from the time of accessing it up to the last stage of service interaction. This also involves trustworthiness of the college and implies that the students will not feel betrayed (Mukumbareza, 2014:47). Hence, the aim of this study was to investigate the system support given to administrative clerks in delivering quality administrative practices to students by the administrative manager, and to evaluate perceptions and expectations of students regarding the current administrative practices.

Students' satisfaction proxies can be classified as follows: Overall satisfaction – this measures students' overall satisfaction with administrative practices in these colleges; Meeting ideal administrative practices – this measures whether administration services provided are meeting the ideal administrative practices expected by students; and Fulfilling expectations – this measures whether the college is fulfilling the expectations of the students (Mukumbareza, 2014:47).

## **2.10 STUDENTS' TRUST**

Customer service is knowledge (or assistance) delivered with care to make life easier for the student (Wahab, 2016:107). Institutions of higher learning are experiencing significant changes, and the focus is moving to competitiveness and customer care. Consumers in the education sector are now much more aware of exactly what they want; and, therefore, the demand for these services is similar to what they demand from commercial businesses (Wahab, 2016:107).

Top management must inspire administrative staff to deliver quality customer service activities. Some scholars argue that HEIs have ignored customer care activities and instead have focused all their attention on producing the final product (Wahab, 2016:107).

## **2.11 STUDENTS' COMPLAINT HANDLING**

According to Mukumbareza (2014:46), students' complaint handling refers to the intensity of complaints and the way in which the college manages these complaints. It is measured in terms of ease of lodging complaints, response time to complaints lodged, and how effectively the complaints are handled, in order for students to be satisfied and have trust in the service of the college. Hence, the administrative staff members are responsible for administrative practices, i.e., capturing and receiving academic information complaints. The interview questions were designed to answer one of the aims of the study regarding administrative practices. Trust plays a significant role in the higher education domain as students build cumulative effects of trust over the years with their lecturers, administrative staff and the institution. Trust is an emotional norm. Perceived service quality often provides confidence about the outcome of any future service encounter (Sultan and Wong, 2013:79).

## **2.12 PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY**

The academic activities in a higher education context are its core values. The academic aspect of perceived service quality, as evidenced from focus group findings, was consistent with the current literature. The current empirical support further intensified the essential role of the academic aspects in a value-laden college context. Administrative practices' quality was found to have similar importance in the overall assessment of service quality in the context of higher education. Administrative service quality refers to those service attributes that provide support services for the smooth functioning of academic activities (Karthikeyan *et al.*, 2015:251). Support services may include skills and abilities of the administrative and support staff and their relationships with students. A shortfall in administrative service quality may result in a poor evaluation of overall service assessment (Karthikeyan *et al.*, 2015:251).

Students' trust is rooted in the delivery on promises made, commitments and the TVETs' overall integrity in solving academic and administrative problems that subsequently determine the relationship strength between student and college staff (Karthikeyan *et al.*, 2015:251).

### **2.13 SERVICE QUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION**

A study conducted by Arpin (2007:1) concluded that interest in the quality of university education has grown considerably over the last decade. Higher education institutions are increasingly placing greater emphasis on meeting students' expectations and needs.

As TVET colleges become more student-orientated, student perceptions of higher educational facilities and services are becoming more important. Interest in the quality of university education has grown considerably over the last decade. Strong interest in the phenomenon has been stimulated and sustained by a range of factors. Students need accurate information about educational quality to help them choose between different courses of study. Academics and colleges administrators need information to help them monitor and improve their courses and programmes. Institutions need information about quality to help them benchmark and market their performance. The Department of Higher Education and Training, as the national assessment body for the National Vocational Certificate (NVC) qualifications on offer at TVET colleges, is responsible for ensuring the credible conduct, administration and management of assessment and examination processes at the local level. The examinations model currently in use for these qualifications is not effective or sustainable in the light of the low performance rates, and ever increasing enrolments per examination cycle. Therefore, this model needs to be reviewed to strengthen the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of assessment and examination processes (Nzimande, 2015:18).

As a lecturer in one of these colleges, it is very disappointing when a student's results are withheld by the Department of Higher Education and Training due to academic information on the system (COLTECH) being incorrect.

If the information on the system is not accurate for the continuous assessment done during the year, the students' results are withheld for lack of evidence. A portfolio of evidence (POE) has to be conducted. The waiting period for the department to respond after the POE is sent to the department is very long and the student cannot register for the following level until results are returned. Administrative clerks play an important role in capturing students' academic information using the system COLTECH, which falls under technologies. According to Nzimande (2015:15), in recent years, many TVET colleges have implemented or are in the process of implementing various types of IT-based business management systems. They have historically been seen as "college administrative systems" focusing on day-to-day college administration. Modern college business management systems are, meanwhile, much more than just administrative systems. A contemporary system responds in a modern way to best practice management and governance reporting requirements – both internally to college executive and college line managers, but also, externally, to parents, students, employers and to various authorities including the Department of Higher Education and Training.

The system support emanates from administrative managers working together with the DHET, which monitors the system. Service quality is among the most popular topics studied by those who are familiar with the service marketing literature. Various attempts and efforts to evaluate service quality performance have been undertaken previously on industrial marketing by adapting the SERVQUAL model to obtain the outcome. This is a phenomenon that certainly brings benefits to the industry as well as the public sector since the entire research outcome will serve as the guideline for further improvement and adjustment in delivering superior service quality to their customers. Excellent service quality is particularly important for public agencies even though their objectives are not-for-profit (Abdullah and Zamhari, 2013:3).

According to a study conducted by Arpin (2007:19), higher education is facing pressure to improve value in its activities. The present view for enhancing educational value is to spend effort on continuous improvement, to focus on stakeholder interests and to increase student satisfaction. Student satisfaction is often used to assess educational quality, where the ability to address strategic needs is of prime importance so that quality in education can be determined by the extent

to which students' needs and expectations can be satisfied (Arpin, 2007:19). The effective and efficient functioning of TVET colleges is pertinent to the development of critical, scarce and intermediate skills for the South African labour market. One of the focus areas of the TVET Colleges Act (2006) is quality assurance systems; these include the evaluation of the performance of information systems as a key performance indicator of organisational success (Visser, 2011:4).

Technical and vocational training in South Africa was established for and linked to manufacturing and industrial pursuit with a focus on the scientific principles underlying the two sectors. A theory-practice combination began to develop years later as industries began to require graduates who possessed certain specific industry-related skills linked to theoretical knowledge. This led to technical colleges providing the theory section of apprenticeship training while workplaces provided context-specific experience for learners (Dlamini, 2014:16). The responsibility of developing a skilled workforce that possessed relevant and responsive skills towards the skills needs of businesses became the responsibility of both the colleges and the business sector (Dlamini, 2014:16). The transformation and restructuring of Technical and Vocational Training colleges in South Africa took place in the late 1990s and led to the renaming of all Technical and Vocational Training Colleges in the country as Further Education and Training (FET) colleges (Dlamini, 2014:16).

## **2.14 ENHANCING TECHNOLOGY AND INVENTION**

Public institutions should adopt relevant technology to enhance their delivery capabilities to ensure speedy, convenient and seamless customers' access to public services through a wide range of delivery channels. As an example, any service transaction can be simplified by making it available online (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:14).

In addition to enhancing technological invention, this study sought to find ways in which administrative practices could be delivered to students at any time convenient to them. Online services is one of the fastest channels of accessing information in any organisation/institution in comparison with face-to-face services.

Hence, students at TVET colleges are not given first preference when it comes to correcting the system error or administrative error that may occur in the students' academic information. If the students' permits are not issued by the department, the

students' continuous assessments are not recognised for the following year and the students cannot write examinations in that year, which means they have to re-register for the subject. Student satisfaction in maintaining highly-rated certificates and producing quality service for future references is very important in any education institution. The South African National Department of Education has committed itself to the establishment of a standardized business management information system in all public TVET colleges that will enable colleges to monitor and account for all their administrative business processes, which include student administration, academic administration, financial administration, human resource management and development and asset management (Visser *et al.*, 2013:3).

## **2.15 DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

The public sector should emphasise encouraging two-way communication between the employee and management as well as with the public. This is important so that management will be able to discover where service errors or defects occur as employees communicate customers' views and opinions. Thus, a good working collaboration between management and employees is crucial (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:14). As the education sector continues to become more student-oriented, students' perceptions of higher educational facilities and services are becoming more important. It is absolutely critical, therefore, that the higher education institutions develop some form of evaluating, tracking and managing the students' perceptions of service. All of the above criteria justify the reason for this study (Green, 2006: 28).

This study agrees with previous studies conducted by Abdullah and Green in developing effective communication strategies in the education sector, and in delivering good administrative practices to student thus building good working collaboration for students.

Anil and Icli (2014:34) conclude that the administrative staff needs to be able to provide services rapidly, be friendly, have specific working hours and be able to guide the students. Trained administrative clerks, who can provide students with thorough information, need to be employed.

## **2.16 INTRODUCING POLICY TO REDUCE BUREAUCRACY**

Management must pay attention to reducing customer dissatisfaction as well as to providing greater convenience to the customer. Some of the initiatives should be in reducing and reviewing cumbersome rules and regulations which will eventually cause customers to feel dissatisfied. As the public demands simplified and convenient processes and procedures, a means for front-line employees to grant exceptions to policies must be developed. Strict adherence to policies often results in an inefficient use of time and unnecessary delays. As an example, adhering to the policy requirement of several documents for an application may cause inconvenience to the customers (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:14).

According to the study conducted by Anil and Icli (2014:34), all students, whatever their experience, demand high quality administrative support. Administrative staff should be client-centred or client-focused and provide effective communication. Communication needs to be a pleasurable experience in which trained staff adopt a friendly, helpful attitude and provide a welcoming environment. Staff needs to be skilled problem solvers and provide acceptable, justifiable responses.

## **2.17 IMPROVING QUALITY OF SERVICES AMONG CURRENT EMPLOYEES**

Employees must have excellent interpersonal skills. It is vital for a public agency to have employees that can inspire confidence among its visitors. Employees must also be knowledgeable, be able to answer customers' questions, and portray good behaviour that will instil confidence in customers. Making the visitors feel safe when they are in the organization is equally important (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:15). Employees responsiveness is important and the consistency of being courteous to customers is something that the management should emphasize. Therefore, it is imperative that management send their staff for training on enhancing interpersonal skills (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:15). Through this training programme, the staff may increase their understanding about the concept and importance of practising new knowledge, skills and good moral values in enhancing job quality (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:15).

It has been shown that administrative service quality does act as a predictor of students' satisfaction. Logical and transparent understanding of administration is an important factor influencing satisfaction and academic development. The first exposure of the student to TVET colleges is through the admission and registrar's services, which should provide high quality service to students and contribute to the positive assessment of the TVET colleges.

## **2.18 BUILDING NETWORKING STRATEGY WITH THE PUBLIC**

Establishing a strong networking system with the public is one of the most vital aspects for the public institution to reach the customer. Several activities can be conducted with the public, such as "A day out with customer" or "dialogue session" to discuss current issues. Through these events, the institution will be able to instil confidence and, eventually, build a very strong relationship with the public so as to enhance the institution's reputation and image (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:15). Determining the perceptions and expectations of students will help the colleges to understand the needs of students and determine the development stages of administrative practices (Jager and Jan, 2016:361).

This will be achieved by putting in place theoretical and practical constructs for measuring students' satisfaction and reaction of administrative staff when delivering administrative practices to students, thereby closing any existing gaps. Measuring students' satisfaction by their experience in higher education is a common practice nowadays. Students' opinions are sought on academic programmes as well as on the complete range of student activities that constitute academic life. Academic life, from the students' perspective, involves experiencing a number of service offerings ranging from teaching quality and learning activities to the quality of on-campus support facilities (Jager and Jan, 2016:361).

Responsiveness refers to the employees' eagerness to help consumers and to provide immediate service. Assurance refers to the employees' required knowledge and courteousness, and empathy relates to the ability in providing caring and individualised customer service (Klerk *et al.*, 2015:163). These factors describe



employees' ability to influence the customers as a way to promote TVET colleges' desire to deliver excellent administrative practices. This involves fulfilling promises, willingness in sharing knowledge and competency of service employees in answering specific customers' queries and requests, providing and creating a warm atmosphere while dealing with customers (students), making them feel comfortable while receiving services, portraying a good image of the TVET colleges and delivering prompt service (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:16).

## **2.19 THEORY OF EVALUATION**

Smith (2006:10) concludes that evaluation is the systematic exploration and judgement of working processes, experiences and outcomes. It pays special attention to aims, values, perceptions, needs and resources. Evaluation entails gathering, ordering and making judgements about information in a methodical way; it is a research process, and is more than monitoring. In relation to the evaluation of administrative practices in three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, the evaluation questions could then seek to determine students' perceptions and expectations regarding administrative practices.

According to Green (2013:25), evaluation theory has been evolving and growing, although there is no single theory of evaluation. The methods of evaluation are still borrowed from social sciences and there is a growing awareness that evaluation is more than simply the application of methods. Quality evaluations are not made solely on service outcome; they also involve evaluations on the process of service delivery. While higher education institutions are trying to increase student numbers each year, the trust of enrolled students and past students may play a vital role in increasing the marketability of the TVET colleges' programmes and the brand itself. A number of studies state that a long-term approach to control marketing costs in an increasingly competitive environment can be done through building student trust in the institution.

This is because students' trust determines the strength of the relationship between students and the institution. Thus, institutional integrity and reliable service performance build students' beliefs and confidence which, in turn, determines students' trust (Sultan and Wong, 2013:10). It is also about employees looking

attractive, showing a sincere interest in solving customers' problems, providing a visually appealing environment and keeping records accurately, with the emphasis on instilling trust in delivering services to the public and the ability to ensure citizens' confidentiality (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:16).

## **2.20 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the determinants and criteria of service quality in connection with administrative practices, which are contributing factors to how services should be conceptualised and delivered. Students' trust, in the context of higher education, was identified as one of the major consequences of service quality evaluation in the context of graduated and dropout students. This is because the evaluation of service performance often provides belief and confidence about the possible outcome of future service encounters (Sultan and Wong, 2013:80). The researcher attempted to emphasise the importance of the factors that comprise service quality and how this quality can be enhanced when these factors are not only considered but also adhered to. The following chapter discusses, in detail, the research methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter three presents the research methodology and design pertaining to this study. The research design is discussed with regards to the target population, the sampling approach indicating the sampling frame and design and how the data were sourced and collected. A discussion of the data collection instruments, their design, layout and administration is followed by an explanation of the preliminary framework, which involved a pilot study and the analysis thereof.

Ethical considerations for conducting the research are highlighted before presenting a detailed discussion of the data analysis involved in this study. The theoretical foundations of this study were the SERVQUAL framework. Evaluating administrative practices at Technical Vocational and Education Training colleges in KwaZulu–Natal; sourcing information from journal publications; books; periodicals; newspapers and magazines; the Internet; discussion documents and previous research allowed for the task of literature analysis and techniques for empirical research to be undertaken.

### **3.2 STUDY TYPE**

The mixed methods approach permits the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study. The use of both quantitative and qualitative strategies in the same study was a viable option to obtain complementary findings and to strengthen research results (Creswell, 2014:35). The different philosophic and research traditions helped the researcher to answer research questions more completely. Triangulation is used to determine a pattern evident in the data collected (Creswell, 2014:35). The study was conducted by means of a mixed methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through prepared SERVQUAL questionnaires. Qualitative data were collected via face-to-face interviews. Most researchers employ this model of gathering both quantitative and qualitative data and then compare the two data sources (Creswell, 2010:40).

Comparison information can provide the researcher with valuable information that can enrich the descriptive reporting of data. For example, a closed-ended survey can be administered and, at the same time, the researcher could conduct an interview to gather additional details. This approach permits the researcher to collect two types of data at once. The provided data are well rounded and detailed (Creswell, 2010:40).

### **3.2.1 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH**

Mixed methods research combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration, and to produce converging findings in the context of complex research questions (Leedy and Omrod, 2014:50). Hossein *et al.* (2011:233) adds that, in mixed methods research, triangulation can be used to validate a data collection instrument and this validation is ensured by attaining the same results. Triangulation is a technique often associated with mixed methods research, and the researcher can be more confident in the result if the use of different methods of sources leads to the same result. There are different kinds of triangulation, viz., method, data, researcher and theory triangulation.

Qualitative research is an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. This type of research enables the researcher to identify issues from the perspectives of the study participants and understand the interpretations as well as meanings that they give to behaviour, events or objects (Creswell, 2014:60).

Qualitative data were gathered in this study in order to identify the challenges experienced by administrative clerks in delivering efficient administrative practices; and to investigate the system support provided by the administrative managers to the administrative clerks in delivering accurate academic information for students. Structured interviews and semi-structured interviews, which comprised both qualitative and quantitative data gathering stages to address the research objectives, were conducted.

Quantitative research is the technique associated with gathering, analysis, interpretation and presentation of numerical data, and involves the interplay among variables after they have been operationalized (Sekaran, 2013:51).

The results or data obtained from these measurements are usually numerical scores that can be summarised, analysed and interpreted using standard statistical procedures (Sekaran, 2013:51). Quantitative data, in this study, were gathered via closed questions on the questionnaire administered to third-year students, in order to determine students' expectations and perceptions regarding administrative practices.

### **3.3 TARGET POPULATION**

According to Sekaran (2013:5), the population is the consideration of the entire group of people, events or other items of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate. Traditionally, the population of this study consisted of administrative managers, administrative clerks and students. Administrative practices involve three parties for processing and consuming the services. Administrative managers monitor the process of delivering good administrative practices in colleges; administrative clerks render administrative practices to students; and students consume the administrative practices in TVET colleges.

### **3.4 SAMPLING**

Random sampling is the most well-known of all sampling strategies (Creswell, 2014:85). A simple random sample is one in which each unit in the accessible population has an equal chance of being included in the sample, and the probability of a unit being selected is not affected by the selection of other units from the accessible population (Creswell, 2014:85).

Simple random sample selection may be accomplished in several ways, including drawing names or numbers out of a box or using a computer programme to generate a sample using random numbers that start with a "seeded" number based on the programme's start time. If a researcher is interested in drawing a random sample, then she or he typically wants the sample to be representative of the population on some characteristic or interest (Sekaran, 2013:10).

Stratified random sampling is a method of sampling that involves the division of a population into smaller groups known as strata. Stratified random sampling combines stratified sampling with random sampling (Leedy and Omrod, 2014:50).

For example, to obtain a stratified random sample of males and females in a college class, the researcher would first separate the entire population of the college into two groups (or strata): one all male and one all female. The researcher would then independently select a random sample from each stratum (one random sample of males, one random sample of females) (Leedy *et al.*, 2014:50).

A stratified random sampling technique was used for staff. In a stratified random sample, the group is known because it has been selected randomly within the particular groups so that the overall sample reflects each group in the known proportion. Convenience sampling involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study. Two types of convenience samples are captive samples and volunteer samples, which focus on how probability and purposive samples can be used to generate the mixed method. The convenience sampling technique was used for students as it was practically difficult to administer questionnaires to students across the entire campuses (Sekaran, 2013:11).

In stratified random sampling, the strata are based on members' shared attributes or characteristics. A random sample from each stratum is taken in a number proportional to the stratum's size when compared to the population. These subsets of the strata are then pooled to form a random sample. The purpose of sampling is to enable researchers to estimate some unknown characteristics of the population. The goal of sampling is to obtain an unbiased or representative sample of the target population (Leedy *et al.*, 2014:55).

Three TVET colleges were selected for evaluation of administrative practices in KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, three administrative managers were part of the study, since each college has one administrative manager, and thirty administrative clerks were to be part of the study, since there were ten administrative clerks per college. There were 220 students registered for level 4 at Elangeni TVET College, 280 students registered for level 4 at Umbumbulu Coastal TVET College and 150 students registered at EThekweni TVET College in the year 2016.

Therefore, 650 students were part of the study. The following formula for determining sample size was used in this study:

$S = \frac{X^2 NP}{(1-P) + D^2 (N-1) + X^2 p (1-P)}$ , S = required sample size,  $X^2$  = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841) N = the population, P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size), D = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

The population of this study was divided into classes. Therefore, the population size of this study was 793. Based on the formula and calculation, the sample size was 67, as indicated in the following calculation of the above formula:

$$\frac{n = (3.841)(793)(0.95)}{(0.5^2) (792) + (3.84)(0.95)(0.05)}$$

$$\frac{n = 144.6808675}{(1.98) + (0.1824475)}$$

$$\frac{144.6808675}{2.1624475} = 66.906$$

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The first step in obtaining data was to send an approved information letter, consent form and gatekeeper's letter to the three selected TVET colleges in KZN. Copies of letters that were submitted can be viewed in *Appendix E* (Information letter), *Appendix F* (Consent Form) and *Appendix G* (Letter to Gatekeepers).

Following ethical considerations, the ethical clearance letter was obtained from the Durban University of Technology; Institutional Ethical clearance letter (*Appendix A*). Before data were collected from students and staff, the following permission letters were obtained from the three TVET colleges in KZN: Permission from Elangeni College (*Appendix B*); Permission from EThekweni College (*Appendix C*); and Permission from Coastal KZN College (*Appendix D*).

Face-to-face interview questions for administrative clerks and administrative managers were used to collect data. The collection of data for this study took place between September 2015 and April 2016. Interviews with administrative clerks and administrative managers were conducted between October 2015 and April 2016.

Data were collected via prepared SERVQUAL questionnaires from third-year students because they had been on campus for a longer period and had better experience in the exposure of services. The questionnaire was designed to enhance the reliability and validity of the data. The administration and distribution of the questionnaire and the systematic administration of the questionnaire is vital to ensure that the process is a smooth transition for data collection. Each questionnaire was numbered with a unique number to preserve anonymity. Convenience sampling was the option for this study in distributing questionnaires to respondents.

Hand delivery at the campuses during intervals, between 10:30 – 11:30, was used, in order to ensure that the target sample definitely received and returned the questionnaires. Administrative clerks' and students' assistance in distributing the questionnaires to the students was used and, after completion of the questionnaires, their assistance was used to collect the questionnaires and hand them back to the researcher. In terms of triangulation of data, a follow-up face-to-face interview was conducted with administrative managers and clerks. The interviews were voice recorded.

### **3.6 DATA SOURCES**

According to Reddy (2014:318), research involves the collection and analysis of data, whether through reading, observation, measurement, asking questions or a combination of these or other strategies. The methods of collecting primary and secondary data differ since primary data are to be originally collected while secondary data sources are interpretations of events of that period based on primary sources (Creswell, 2014:90). Questionnaires were physically collected from students immediately after completion. It took one month for each college to reach all the level fours (4s) registered since the researcher was sourcing and collecting during break times only.



Face-to-face interviews were conducted and were voice recorded. It took one month per college to reach administrative clerks and administrative managers. All questions and responses for the interviews were written down because some of administrative clerks did not have time to do one-on-one interviews.

### 3.7 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

The SERVQUAL model measured service quality on the five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). These dimensions were well suited in evaluating service quality in administrative services at TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. In an effort to measure the quality of service, Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985) developed SERVQUAL, an instrument for measuring customer expectations and perceptions of service quality.

The SERVQUAL measuring instrument with five dimensions was used in this study to determine the service quality gaps in administrative practices, because it linked to customer expectations and perceptions in service quality. SERVQUAL was directly applied to the higher education sector to measure service quality in general, rather than measuring basic service quality in higher education (Anil and Icli 2014:34). The research instrument consisted of 30 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into six sections which measured various, themes as illustrated in Table 3.1 below:

**Table 3.1: Sections which were Formulated for the Questionnaire**

1	Biographical data;
2	Tangibles;
3	Reliability;
4	Responsiveness;
5	Assurance; and
6	Empathy;

Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985) developed the service quality model with five factors, viz., tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

### **3.8 RELIABILITY STATISTICS**

The two most important aspects of precision are reliability and validity. Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as “acceptable” (Tavakol and Dennick 2011:85).

It is possible to objectively measure the reliability of an instrument and Cronbach’s alpha is the most widely used objective measure of reliability. The improper use of alpha can lead to situations in which either a test or scale is wrongly discarded or the test is criticized for not generating trustworthy results. The Cronbach’s alpha was applied by a qualified statistician in this research (Tavakol and Dennick 2011:85)

According to Golatshani (2003:597), validity checks whether a research instrument is valid, i.e., questionnaire, whether it measures what it is supposed to measure and, therefore, how truthful and correctly focused the research results will be. Therefore, the pilot study had already established that the kinds of data needed to answer the research questions were obtained from the questionnaire.

### **3.9 PILOT TESTING**

In terms of the pilot testing of the questionnaire, for the purpose of this study, thirty respondents participated at Elangeni TVET College Mpumalanga campus. They were randomly selected to test the questionnaire and three administrative clerks and one administrative manager were interviewed to test questions so that the necessary revisions could be made before administration to the research sample. The purpose of a pilot test is to refine the questions on the questionnaire in order to ensure that there is no ambiguity or bias so that the measuring instrument is fine-tuned for data collection (Creswell, 2014:90). The validity and reliability of the pilot test was conducted prior to the administration of the questionnaire.

According to Reddy (2014:118), all data gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes to complete them, to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable one to remove any items which do not yield usable data. The purpose of the pilot study is to get the bugs out of the instrument so that respondents in the main study will experience no difficulty in completing it.

The purpose of this testing is to ensure that the level of language used in the questions is appropriate and understandable to the audience; Assess whether the questions are understood as intended; Test different versions of a question; and Determine whether the order of questions is logical and instructions are correct.

Pilot testing the questionnaires, therefore, enabled all necessary revisions to be made before administration to the main samples. Ten percent of the sample was randomly selected from the list of full-time staff using the same selection method, as described in the recruitment of participants. The administration of the questionnaires was exactly the same as described above. When administering the questionnaires, the sample used in the pilot testing did not form part of the sample selected for collecting data.

### **3.10 DATA ANALYSIS**

The first step in the process of analysis was ensuring that the collected data were error-free and of a good quality. This was achieved by reviewing the recordings and ensuring that all predefined prompts had been addressed.

The recordings and scribed data were checked against each other, to ensure that the correct information was captured and was of a good quality. Transcripts were then made from the audio recordings. The next step was to code the data. This is when the data are categorised and identified by assigning a code. Data coding involves transferring separate code numbers to each category of each variable in the study. The researcher of this study assigned a number to each questionnaire received to enable effective coding. Data were edited using a number of criteria, viz., entirety, comprehensibility, consistency and uniformity. The questionnaires were statistically analysed using the latest version 15.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS).

According to Green (2009:27), the research process is divided into five steps, viz., planning, data collection, editing and coding, analysis and conclusion. Once the planning and data collection stage was completed, the researcher proceeded to edit and code the data. The quantitative results were analysed using descriptive statistics including tables, graphs and statistical summaries.

Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. The object of qualitative content analysis can be all sorts of recorded communication (transcripts of interviews, discourses, protocols of observations, video tapes, or documents). Content analysis analyses not only the manifest content of the material - as its name may suggest. Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, and methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication (Mayring, 2000:8).

With the qualitative content analysis, the researcher wanted to describe procedures of systematic text analysis which tries to preserve the strengths of content analysis in communication science (theory reference, step models, model of communication, category leded, criteria of validity and reliability) to develop qualitative procedures (inductive category development, summarizing, context analysis, deductive category application), which are methodologically controlled. These procedures allow for a connection to quantitative steps of analysis if it seems meaningful to the analyst (Mayring, 2000:10).

The SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to evaluate administrative practices and the assessment involved in computing the difference between the ratings assigned to the expectations and perceptions statements, i.e.,  $SQ = P - E$ . An average score was calculated for each response on the statements in both the expectation and perception sections of the SERVQUAL questionnaire based on the five-point Likert scale (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). The perceptions and expectations sections of the questionnaire were plotted on comparative bar graphs. Tables comparing means and modes of these sections were also completed.

### **3.11 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research is simply the process of finding solutions to a problem after thorough study and analysis of the situational factors. Research also relates to the arrangement of conditions for the collection, measurement and analysis of data in a manner that indicates the relevance to the research purpose, which ultimately forms the conceptual structure within which the research is conducted. It includes the outline of the research from writing the hypothesis and its operational implications to the final analysis of data (Babbie, 2010:318). According to Creswell (2014:89) quantitative data is any data that is in numerical form, such as statistics and percentages and qualitative research as an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. Hence the study used quantitative and qualitative research design.

The research aim and objectives of this study were to evaluate the quality of administrative practices in the above-mentioned three TVET colleges in KZN. The theoretical foundations of this research were formulated on the basis of the literature analysis. Literature analysis of current business theory in terms of the SERVQUAL framework and service delivery at tertiary institutions was undertaken. Sourcing information from journal publications, books, periodicals, newspapers and magazines, the Internet, discussion documents and previous research allowed for the task of literature analysis and techniques for empirical research to be undertaken.

### **3.12 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

#### **3.12.1 QUESTIONNAIRE**

The role of the questionnaire is to elicit the information that is required to enable the researcher to answer the objectives of the survey (Reddy, 2014:318). A questionnaire is a pre-formulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers. These answers are usually within fairly closely defined alternatives.

Questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed questions. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents to express their opinions. Standard answers were required for the closed questions (Reddy, 2014:318).

The open-ended questions were designed to ask participants to formulate their own responses and the length of their answers was controlled by the amount of space provided on the questionnaire. Partially open-ended questions were also asked on the four objectives similar to closed questions with the alternative of recommendations as an option with a space for comments. The closed questions asked the respondents to choose from a list of alternatives which could be the one answer that best represented their beliefs about administrative practices. Rating scale questions, namely, a Likert rating scale, asked the respondents to put a cross next to the answer representing their expectations and perceptions, i.e., to rate their level of agreement with the statement, thereby indicating gaps that currently exist.

### **3.12.2 DESIGN OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

For the data collected in a survey to be both reliable and valid, the researcher must carefully plan the survey instrument so that the correct decision is made in deciding which responses to allow. The type of questions used and the order in which they appear may vary depending on how the survey is ultimately administered. Simply stated, a questionnaire is a list of questions which is prepared beforehand. Respondents can answer these questions either in their own words or by choosing from a set of responses that are prepared beforehand (Creswell, 2014:90).

From both an ethical and practical viewpoint, questionnaires contained information pertaining to the purpose; confidentiality; voluntary participation; and the researcher's contact details. The instructions to the respondent in terms of how to answer the questions were made very clear since mistakes can invalidate the entire questionnaire. The questionnaire design was customised to be appealing to the intended audience. The following pre-contact information, such as cover letters and consent forms, including: the Institutional Research Ethics Clearance Letters for pre-approval and full approval (IREC) from DUT, was obtained.

### 3.12.3 LAYOUT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As indicated earlier, one set of questionnaires was designed for students to evaluate administrative practices. The questionnaire contained three pages and three sections and included concise instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

**Section A:** had four questions which pertained to the respondents' personal details. The first four closed-ended questions enabled the researcher to gather information about the respondents: gender, age, race and their courses.

**Section B:** adapted the modified SERVQUAL instrument (RATER) and used a Likert scale where respondents were requested to rate their levels of expectations and perceptions with regard to administrative practices' delivery that they are currently receiving.

**Section C:** was an open-ended question and it was optional. Participants were requested to state recommendations and suggestions for improvement regarding administrative practices being offered by administrative clerks at their college.

### 3.13 INTERVIEWS

An interview is a conversation that has a structure determined by the interviewer; it is a professional interaction which becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of gathering thoroughly tested knowledge. Interviews can be considered as the verbal equivalent of a pencil and paper survey, during which the researcher has a conversation with the respondent and the conversation has a purpose (Creswell, 2014:108). There are three different types of interviews; structured or standardised; semi-structured; and the unstructured or unstandardized interview (Creswell, 2014:108).

For the purpose of this study, structured interviews were used. Structured (standardised) interviews are somewhat formal in structure: the questions are typically asked in a specific order; and there is little deviation of the wording of questions. Questions are asked as they are written and no general questions about the interview or questions are added on the spur of the moment (Reddy, 2014.325).

In accordance with the above, structured interviews were conducted with the administrative managers and administrative clerks. This was done with the consent of the administrative clerks. The structured interviews, also referred to as recording schedules, were voice-recorded by the researcher at a location that was mutually agreed upon. A cellular phone was used as backup for the recording of these interviews. The semi-structured interview flowed according to the theme of the study. The interviewees were initially briefed on the study purpose. The interviewer (researcher) then asked questions which pertained to the administrative practices, the types of information service delivered, followed by questions on solutions and general issues regarding administrative service delivery since the migration.

The duration of each interview was approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The researcher also documented answers and additional comments. After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, a copy of the transcription was given to each participant to verify the correctness of the information provided.

### **3.14 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has detailed the research methodology that was adopted for the study. This was done by explaining the research design and strategies that were devised in order to achieve the objectives of the study, This chapter discussed the research methodology of this study and elaborated on the research instrument design, the sample, pilot testing of data collection instruments, the data collection method and the analysis of the data. The following chapter will discuss the results of the study.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

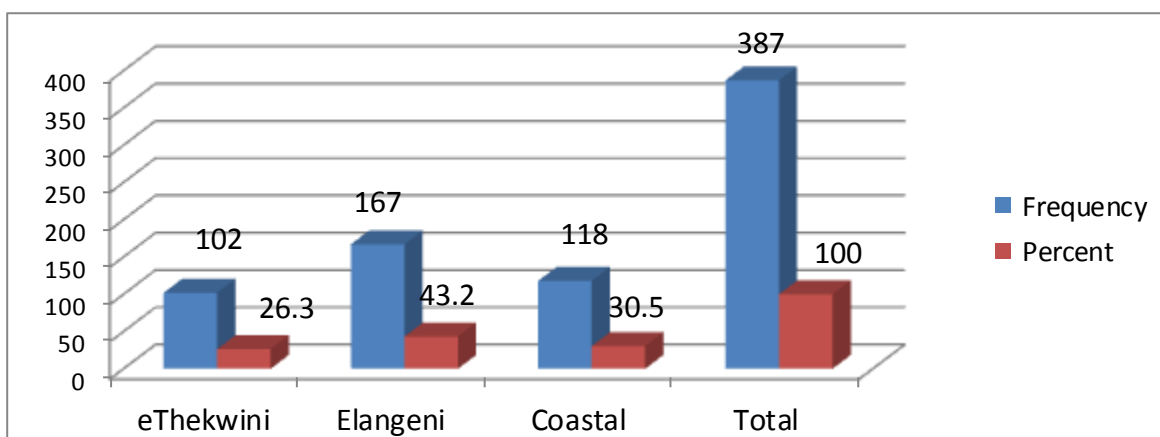
### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter represents the data that were collected with the use of the SERVQUAL questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was the primary tool that was used to collect data and was distributed to students at three TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. The data collected from the responses were analysed with SPSS version 24.0. The results present the descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, cross tabulations and other figures for the quantitative data. Inferential techniques include the use of correlations and chi-square test values which are interpreted using the p-values.

### **4.2 THE SAMPLE**

A total of 400 questionnaires were personally administered to level-four students at the three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. Thirty students were selected for the pilot study and then eliminated from the main study. The researcher collected questionnaires soon after completion from students; 400 questionnaires were despatched and 387 were returned, which resulted in a 97 percent response rate. Ten administrative clerks were interviewed and interviews were voice recorded, transcribed and a cellular phone was used as a backup. Administrative clerks were willing to participate in semi-structured interviews. Figure 4.1 illustrates the sample size of the study.

**Figure 4.1: The Sample Size**



As indicated in Figure 4.1 of the sample size, at eThekweni TVET college, 102 students were part of the study; at Elangeni TVET college, 167 students were part of the study; and at Coastal TVET college, 118 students were part of the study, yielding a total of 387 participants. All but 1.3% of the sample were African respondents.

### 4.3 THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The research instrument consisted of 30 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 6 sections which measured various themes, as illustrated below:

- 1 Biographical data;
- 2 Tangibles;
- 3 Reliability;
- 4 Responsiveness;
- 5 Assurance; and
- 6 Empathy.

#### 4.3.1 Reliability Statistics

The two most important aspects of precision are reliability and validity. Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as “acceptable”. Table 4.1 reflects the Cronbach’s alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

**Table 4.1: Cronbach’s Alpha Scores**

		Expectation	Perception
	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	
Tangibles	4 of 4	0.812	0.744
Reliability	4 of 4	0.889	0.829
Responsiveness	4 of 4	0.868	0.812
Assurance	4 of 4	0.915	0.625
Empathy	5 of 5	0.914	0.863

The reliability scores for all sections exceed the recommended Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.700. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research. Only the section on perception scored slightly below 0.700.

#### 4.4 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Third-year students in all courses were part of the study. All three colleges were dominated by females with respect to staff and students. Overall, the ratio of males to females is approximately 1:4 (28.3 %: 71.7 %). Within the age category of 25 to 30 years, 19.7% were male. Within the category of males (only), 12.1% were between the ages of 25 to 30 years. This category of males between the ages of 25 to 30 years formed 3.4% of the total sample.

**Figure 4.2: Overall Gender distribution of the Respondents**

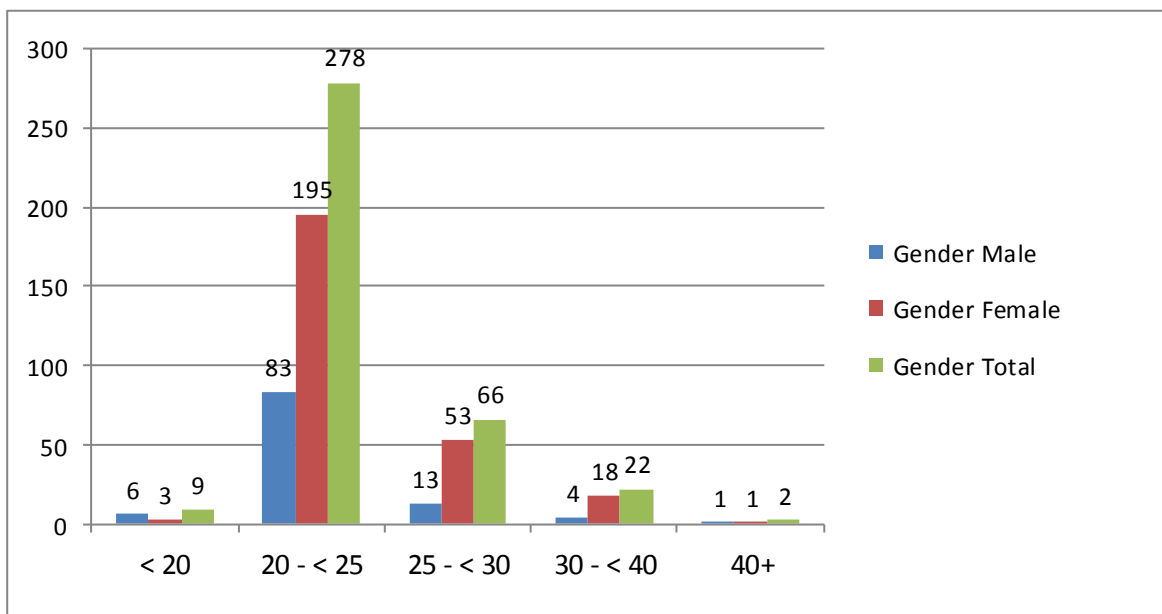
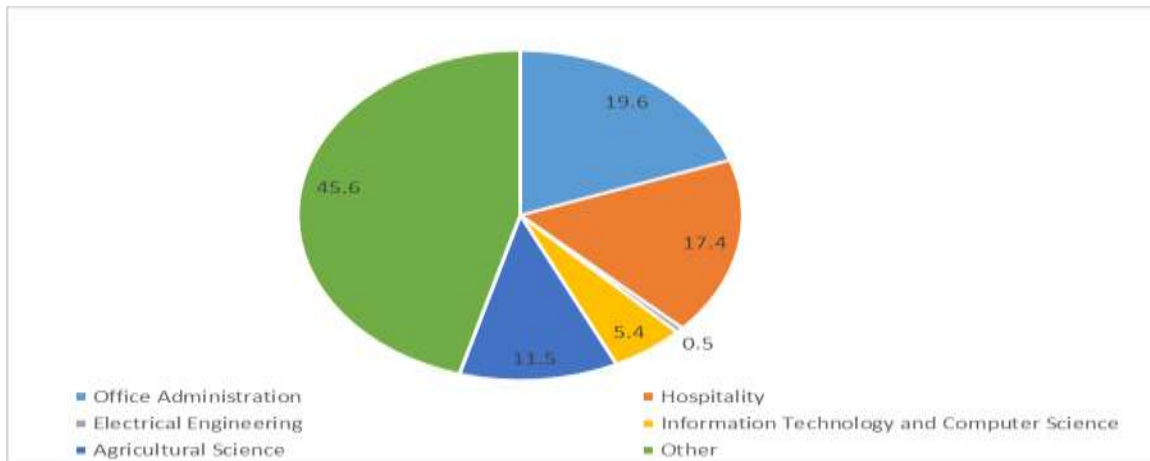


Figure 4.3, which depicts the course enrolments, indicates that nearly half of the level 4 respondents (45.6 percent) did not identify the course they were studying. Likewise, other students who did not identify their course were as follows: Office Administration (19.6 percent); Hospitality (17.4 percent); Information Technology and Computer Sciences (5.4 percent); Electrical Engineering (0.5 percent); and Agricultural Science (11.5 percent).

**Figure 4.3: The Course Enrolments**



#### **4.5 FINDINGS ON THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

According to Creswell (2014:53), interpretation enables the researcher to interpret the meaning of the results/findings once they are presented. They add that, in quantitative data analysis, the results are compared with the initial research questions to determine how the questions were answered in the study.

##### **4.5.1 FINDINGS ON EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

The section that follows presents the scoring patterns of the respondents per variable per section. The graphs below indicate the mean scores for each statement, as well as the gap scores (which are the differences between the expectations and perceptions) for each dimension. Tables of mean scores are also presented by dimension. Results are then further analysed according to the importance of the statements.

###### **4.5.1.1 TANGIBLES**

**Tangibles comprised of the following four statements in the questionnaire:**

Tangibles (T1): The physical facilities are visually appealing administration venues;

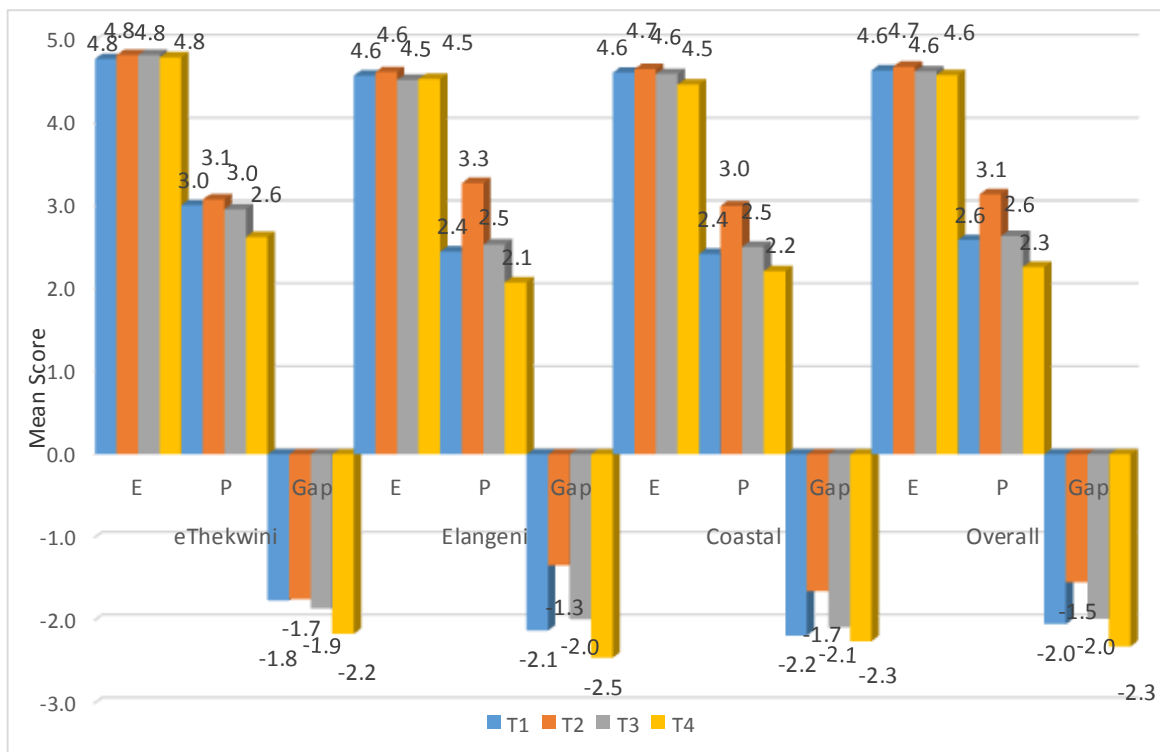
Tangibles (T2): Administrative clerks are neat in appearance; Tangibles (T3):

Materials associated with administrative practices (such as pamphlets, notes and guides) are visually appealing in the administration venues; and Tangibles (T4): Administrative clerks are always willing to assist, provide prompt service and are never too busy to respond. Results are shown in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.4.

**Table 4.2: Response to Dimension 1 on Tangibles**

Statements	eThekwini			Elangeni			Coastal			Overall		
	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap
T1	4.8	3.0	-1.8	4.6	2.4	-2.1	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.6	-2.0
T2	4.8	3.1	-1.7	4.6	3.3	-1.3	4.7	3.0	-1.7	4.7	3.1	-1.5
T3	4.8	3.0	-1.9	4.5	2.5	-2.0	4.6	2.5	-2.1	4.6	2.6	-2.0
T4	4.8	2.6	-2.2	4.5	2.1	-2.5	4.5	2.2	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.3
Average	4.8	2.9	-1.9	4.6	2.6	-2.0	4.6	2.5	-2.0	4.6	2.7	-2.0

**Figure 4.4: Graph Depicting Results for Dimension 1 on Tangibles**



It is noted that the expected scores are larger than perceived scores. This has resulted in gaps, and gaps larger than 2 are considered significant. It is observed that many of the statements are close to the value of 2 (1.7 – 1.9). These, too, can be regarded as significant. The overall gaps for all three colleges are approximately 2. This is across the entire dimension. This implies that respondents did identify significant gaps for each of the statements that made up the dimension. That is, respondents were not totally satisfied with the physical facilities being visually appealing (Tangible 1), the appearance of administrative clerks (Tangible 2), the visual appeal of the materials associated with the colleges (Tangible 3) and the willingness of the administrative clerks to assist and providing prompt service (Tangible 4).

To determine whether the scoring patterns for each statement between the colleges were significantly different, a Kruskal Wallis test was performed. The null hypothesis claims that there is no difference. The results are as follows.

**Table 4.3: Tangibles – Kruskal Wallis Test**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
T_E_1	7.922	2	0.019
T_P_1	14.669	2	0.001
T_G_1	8.489	2	0.014
T_E_2	6.745	2	0.034
T_P_2	3.455	2	0.178
T_G_2	5.345	2	0.069
T_E_3	11.501	2	0.003
T_P_3	8.903	2	0.012
T_G_3	2.743	2	0.254
T_E_4	8.067	2	0.018
T_P_4	14.898	2	0.001
T_G_4	4.401	2	0.111

The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar.

That is, the differences between the way respondents scored were significant. An inspection of the, Table 4.2 indicates that eThekwini scored higher on expectations than the other two colleges (T\_E\_1) (Tangibles\_Expectation\_1).

The Wilcoxon Test below compared the overall significance of the differences between expectations and perceptions (independent of college).

**Table 4.4: Tangibles – Wilcoxon Test**

	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
T_P_1 - T_E_1	-15.085	0.000
T_P_2 - T_E_2	-14.385	0.000
T_P_3 - T_E_3	-15.200	0.000
T_P_4 - T_E_4	-15.564	0.000

The differences observed were all significant. What was received was significantly less than what was expected.

#### **4.5.1.2 RELIABILITY**

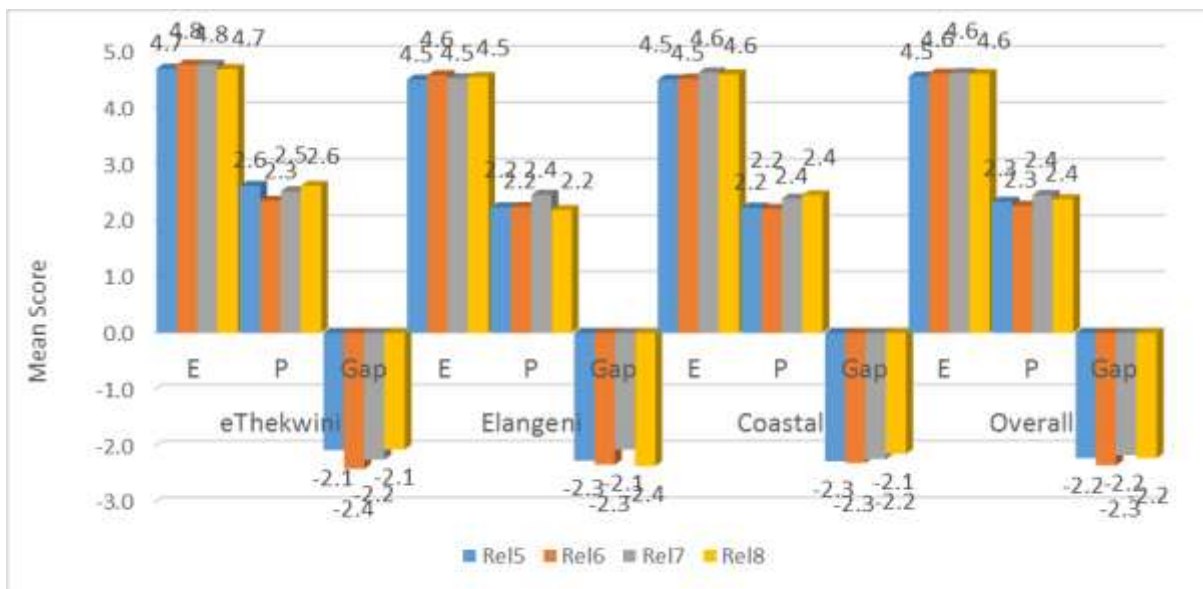
**Reliability comprised of the following four statements in the questionnaire:**

(Rel5): When administrative clerks promise to do something by a certain time, they do so; (Rel6): When students have a problem, administrative clerks will show a sincere interest in solving it; (Rel7): Administrative clerks perform the service right the first time (attending to query, providing quotes, etc.); and (Rel8): Administrative clerks provide the service in the time promised (meet deadlines). Results are illustrated in Table 4.5 and Figure 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Response to Dimension 2 on Reliability**

Statements	eThekwini			Elangeni			Coastal			Overall		
	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap
Rel5	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.5	2.2	-2.3	4.5	2.2	-2.3	4.5	2.3	-2.2
Rel6	4.8	2.3	-2.4	4.6	2.2	-2.3	4.5	2.2	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.3
Rel7	4.8	2.5	-2.2	4.5	2.4	-2.1	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2
Rel8	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.5	2.2	-2.4	4.6	2.4	-2.1	4.6	2.4	-2.2
Average	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.5	2.3	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.2	4.6	2.3	-2.2

**Figure 4.5: Graph Depicting Results for Dimension 2 on Reliability**



The following patterns are observed. It is evident that the expected scores are greater than the perceived scores across all statements as well as all colleges. It is observed that all statements yielded a gap in excess of the value 2 and is regarded as significant. The overall gap for all 3 colleges is 2.2 and this is across the entire dimension. The implication is that respondents did identify significant gaps for each of the statements that constitute the dimension.



Respondents were not satisfied with administrative clerks promising to do something by a certain time (Rel5); When students have a problem, administrative clerks will show a sincere interest in solving it (Rel6); Administrative clerks perform the service right the first time (attending to query, providing quotes, etc.) (Rel7); and Administrative clerks provide the service in the time promised (meet deadlines) (Rel8).

To determine whether the scoring patterns for each statement between the colleges were significantly different, a Kruskal Wallis test was performed. The null hypothesis claims that there is no difference. The results are as follows.

**Table 4.6: Reliability – Kruskal Wallis Test**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Rel_E_5	4.905	2	0.086
Rel_P_5	7.895	2	0.019
Rel_G_5	2.766	2	0.251
Rel_E_6	11.768	2	0.003
Rel_P_6	0.412	2	0.814
Rel_G_6	0.022	2	0.989
Rel_E_7	8.992	2	0.011
Rel_P_7	0.955	2	0.620
Rel_G_7	1.187	2	0.552
Rel_E_8	5.042	2	0.080
Rel_P_8	8.240	2	0.016
Rel_G_8	4.198	2	0.123

The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the way respondents scored were significant. An inspection of Table 4.5; indicates that eThekweni scored higher on expectations than the other two colleges (R\_E\_1) (Reliability\_Expectation\_1). The Wilcoxon Test below compared the overall significance of the differences between expectations and perceptions (independent of college).

**Table 4:7 Reliability – Wilcoxon Test**

	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Rel_P_5 - Rel_E_5	-15.140	0.000
Rel_P_6 - Rel_E_6	-15.985	0.000
Rel_P_7 - Rel_E_7	-15.565	0.000
Rel_P_8 - Rel_E_8	-15.255	0.000

The differences observed were all significant. What was received was significantly less than what was expected.

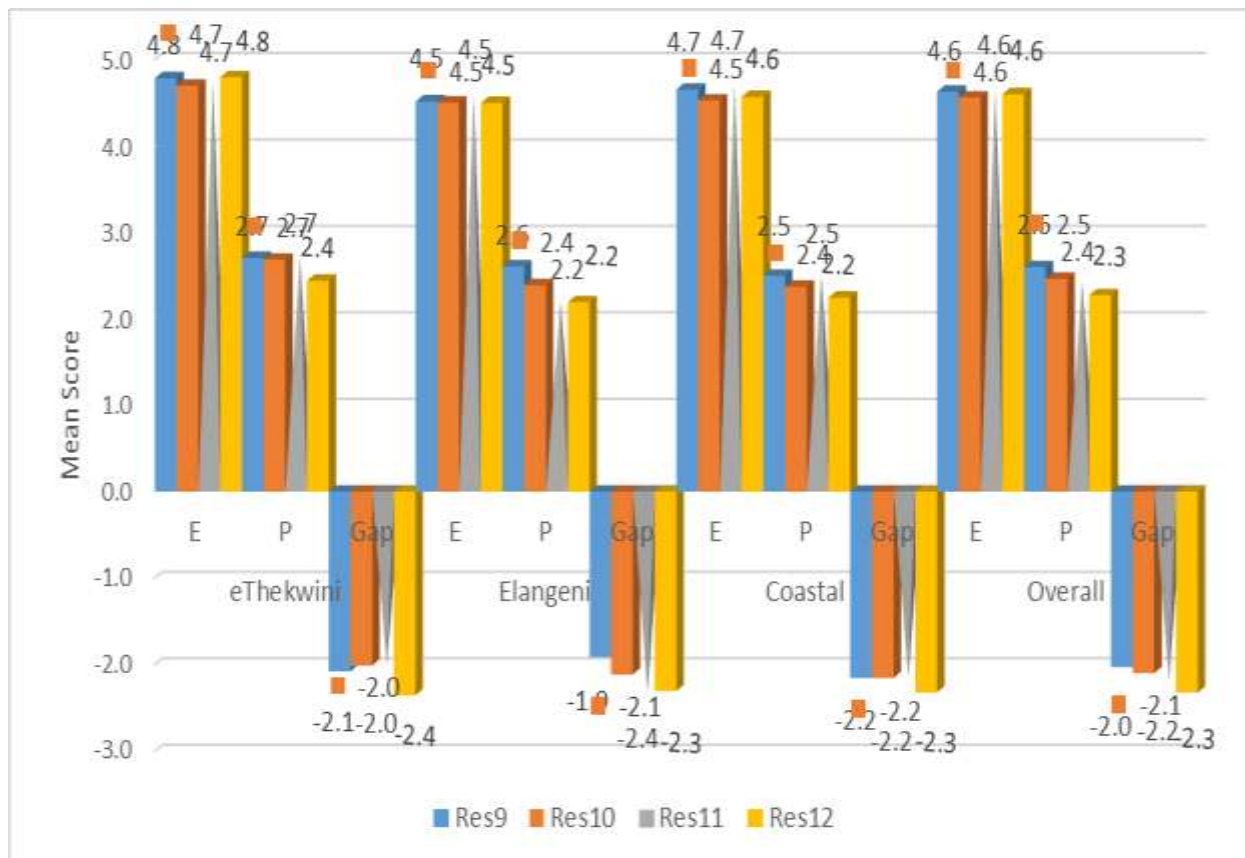
#### 4.5.1.3 RESPONSIVENESS

**Responsiveness comprised of the following four statements:** (Res9): Administrative clerks always inform students exactly when the administrative services will be offered; (Res10): Administrative clerks give prompt service to students; (Res11): All administrative clerks are always willing to help customers; and (Res12): All administrative clerks are never too busy to respond to a student’s request. The results are illustrated in Table 4.8 and Figure 4.6.

**Table 4.8: Response to Dimension 3 on Responsiveness**

Statements	eThekwini			Elangeni			Coastal			Overall		
	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap
Res9	4.8	2.7	-2.1	4.5	2.6	-1.9	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.6	-2.0
Res10	4.7	2.7	-2.0	4.5	2.4	-2.1	4.5	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.5	-2.1
Res11	4.7	2.7	-2.0	4.5	2.2	-2.4	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2
Res12	4.8	2.4	-2.4	4.5	2.2	-2.3	4.6	2.2	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.3
Average	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.5	2.3	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2

**Figure 4.6: Graph Depicting Results for Dimension 3 on Responsiveness**



The results indicate that the scores for expectations are greater than the perceived scores. This has created gaps, and all the gaps larger than 2 are considered significant. Observation of the results indicates that many of the statements are close to the value of 2 (1.9). The overall gaps for all three colleges is 2.2. This implies that the respondents did identify significant gaps for each of the statements that comprised of the dimension. The results show that the respondents were not satisfied with: Administrative clerks always informing students exactly when the administrative services will be offered (Res9); Administrative clerks giving prompt service to students (Res10); All administrative clerks are always willing to help customers (Res11); and All administrative clerks are never too busy to respond to a student's request (Res12). A Kruskal Wallis test was performed to determine whether the scoring patterns for each statement pertaining to responsiveness were significantly different across the 3 colleges. The null hypothesis claims that there is no difference. The results are as follows.

**Table 4.9: Kruskal Wallis Test on Responsiveness Dimension**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Res_E_9	8.628	2	0.013
Res_P_9	1.212	2	0.546
Res_G_9	2.129	2	0.345
Res_E_10	8.862	2	0.012
Res_P_10	3.646	2	0.162
Res_G_10	1.257	2	0.533
Res_E_11	6.811	2	0.033
Res_P_11	9.921	2	0.007
Res_G_11	3.399	2	0.183
Res_E_12	11.413	2	0.003
Res_P_12	1.876	2	0.391
Res_G_12	0.035	2	0.983

The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the way respondents scored were significant. An inspection of Table 4.8 indicates that eThekweni scored higher on expectations than the other two colleges (R\_E\_1) (Responsiveness\_Expectation\_1). The Wilcoxon Test compared the overall significance of the differences between expectations and perceptions (independent of college).

**Table 4.10: Wilcoxon Test on Responsiveness Dimension**

	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Res_P_9 - Res_E_9	-14.840 <sup>b</sup>	0.000
Res_P_10 - Res_E_10	-15.333 <sup>b</sup>	0.000
Res_P_11 - Res_E_11	-15.592 <sup>b</sup>	0.000
Res_P_12 - Res_E_12	-15.840 <sup>b</sup>	0.000

The differences observed were all significant. What was received was significantly less than what was expected.

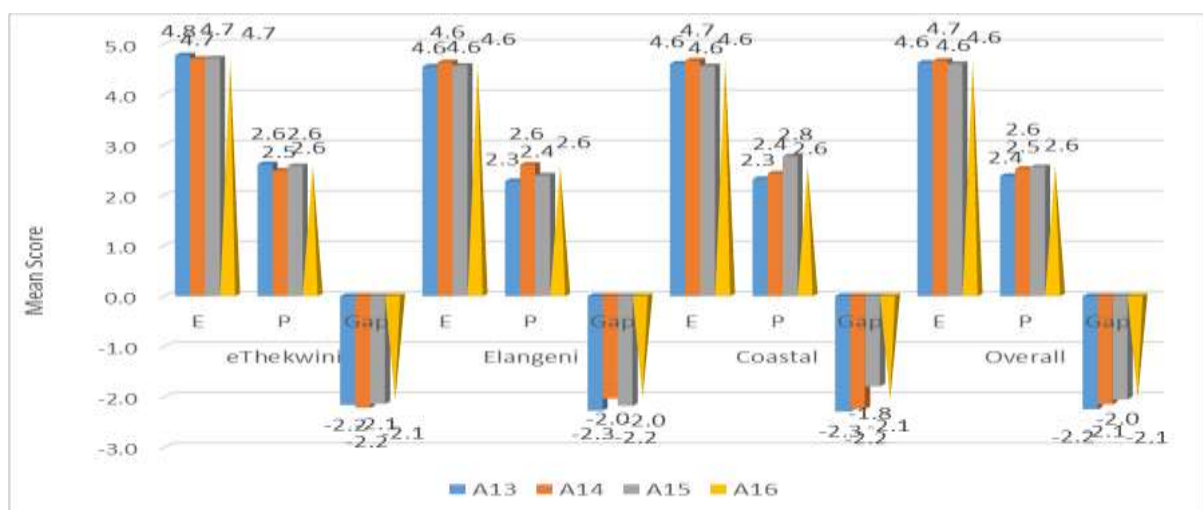
#### 4.5.1.4 ASSURANCE

Assurance comprised of the following four statements: (A13): The behaviour of administrative clerks instils confidence to students; (A14): Students feel safe in their enquiries with administrative clerks; (A15): Administrative clerks are consistently courteous with students' enquiries; and (A16): Administrative clerks have knowledge relevant to students' questions. See the results in Table 4.11 and Figure 4.7.

**Table 4.11: Response to Dimension 4 on Assurance**

Statements	eThekwini			Elangeni			Coastal			Overall		
	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap
A13	4.8	2.6	-2.2	4.6	2.3	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.3	4.6	2.4	-2.2
A14	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.6	-2.0	4.7	2.4	-2.2	4.7	2.5	-2.1
A15	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.8	-1.8	4.6	2.6	-2.0
A16	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.6	2.6	-2.0	4.6	2.6	-2.1	4.6	2.6	-2.1
Average	4.7	2.6	-2.2	4.6	2.5	-2.1	4.6	2.5	-2.1	4.6	2.5	-2.1

**Figure 4.7: Graph Depicting Results for Dimension 4 of Assurance**



The results indicate that the scores for expectations are greater than the perceived scores. This has created gaps, and all the gaps larger than 2 are considered significant. Observation of the results indicate that many of the statements are close to the value of 2. The overall gaps for all 3 colleges is 2.1. This implies that the respondents did identify significant gaps for each of the statements that comprised of the dimension. The results show that the respondents were not satisfied with: The behaviour of administrative clerks instilling confidence to students; (A14): Students feeling safe in their enquiries with administrative clerks; (A15): Administrative clerks being consistently courteous with students' enquiries; and (A16): Administrative clerks having knowledge relevant to students' questions.

A Kruskal Wallis test was performed to determine whether the scoring patterns for each statement pertaining to responsiveness were significantly different across the 3 colleges. The null hypothesis claims that there is no difference. The results are shown in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12: Kruskal Wallis Test on Assurance Dimension**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
A_E_13	8.950	2	0.011
A_P_13	4.476	2	0.107
A_G_13	1.103	2	0.576
A_E_14	3.909	2	0.142
A_P_14	1.243	2	0.537
A_G_14	1.939	2	0.379
A_E_15	6.913	2	0.032
A_P_15	2.429	2	0.297
A_G_15	0.609	2	0.737
A_E_16	3.342	2	0.188
A_P_16	0.003	2	0.999
A_G_16	0.457	2	0.796

The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the way respondents scored were significant. An inspection of the Table 4.11; indicates that eThekwini scored higher on expectations than the other two colleges (A\_E\_1) (Assurance \_Expectation\_1).

**Table 4.13: Wilcoxon Test on Assurance Dimension**

	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
A_P_13 - A_E_13	-16.009	0.000
A_P_14 - A_E_14	-15.700	0.000
A_P_15 - A_E_15	-15.565	0.000
A_P_16 - A_E_16	-15.308	0.000

The differences observed were all significant. What was received was significantly less than what was expected.

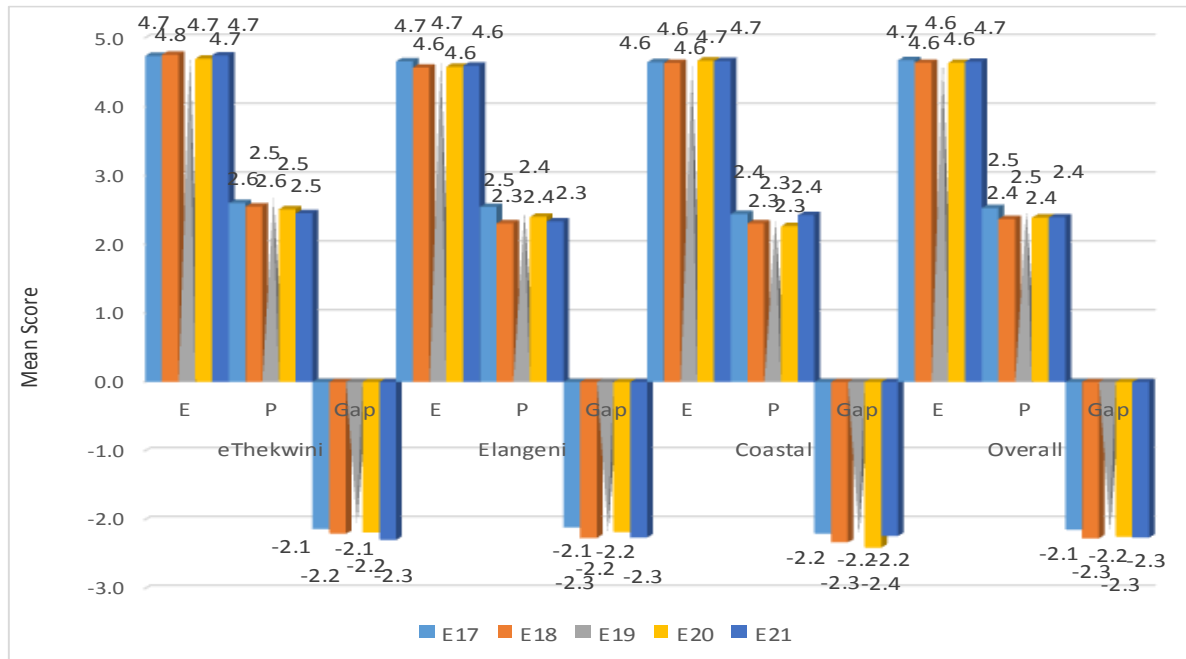
#### 4.5.1.5 EMPATHY

**Empathy comprised of the following five statements:** (E18): Administrative clerks give each student request individual attention; (E19): Administrative clerks have best interest at heart to help students; (E20): Administrative clerks give each student personal attention; and (E21): Administrative clerks understand the specific needs of each student. Results are shown in Table 4.14 and Figure 4.8.

**Table 4.14: Response to Dimension 5 on Empathy**

Statements	eThekwini			Elangeni			Coastal			Overall		
	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap
E17	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.7	2.5	-2.1	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.7	2.5	-2.1
E18	4.8	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.3	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.3	4.6	2.4	-2.3
E19	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.7	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.3	-2.2	4.6	2.5	-2.2
E20	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.7	2.3	-2.4	4.6	2.4	-2.3
E21	4.7	2.5	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.3	4.7	2.4	-2.2	4.7	2.4	-2.3
Average	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.3	4.6	2.4	-2.2

**Figure 4.8: Graph Depicting Results for Dimension 5 of Empathy**



The results indicate that the scores for expectations are greater than the perceived scores. This has created gaps, and all the gaps larger than 2 are considered significant. Observation of the results indicate that many of the statements are close to the value of 2. The overall gaps for all 3 colleges is 2.1. This implies that the respondents did identify significant gaps for each of the statements that comprised of the dimension. The results show that the respondents were not satisfied with: (E18): Administrative clerks giving each student request individual attention; (E19): Administrative clerks having the best interest at heart to help students; (E20): Administrative clerks giving each student personal attention; and (E21): Administrative clerks understanding the specific needs of each student.

A Kruskal Wallis test was performed to determine whether the scoring patterns for each statement pertaining to responsiveness were significantly different across the three colleges. The null hypothesis claims that there is no difference. The results are shown in Table 4.15.



**Table 4.15: Kruskal Wallis Test on Empathy Dimension**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
E_E_17	2.222	2	0.329
E_P_17	0.733	2	0.693
E_G_17	0.342	2	0.843
E_E_18	7.483	2	0.024
E_P_18	2.066	2	0.356
E_G_18	0.458	2	0.795
E_E_19	5.163	2	0.076
E_P_19	2.891	2	0.236
E_G_19	0.813	2	0.666
E_E_20	4.425	2	0.109
E_P_20	2.129	2	0.345
E_G_20	1.875	2	0.392
E_E_21	4.408	2	0.110
E_P_21	0.450	2	0.798
E_G_21	0.087	2	0.958

The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the way respondents scored were significant. An inspection of the Table: 4.14; indicates that eThekwini scored higher on expectations than the other two colleges (E\_E\_1) (Empathy\_Expectation\_1).

**Table 4.16: Wilcoxon Test on Empathy Dimension**

	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
E_P_17 - E_E_17	-15.380	0.000
E_P_18 - E_E_18	-15.832	0.000
E_P_19 - E_E_19	-15.393	0.000
E_P_20 - E_E_20	-15.836	0.000
E_P_21 - E_E_21	-15.680	0.000

The differences observed were all significant. What was received was significantly less than what was expected.

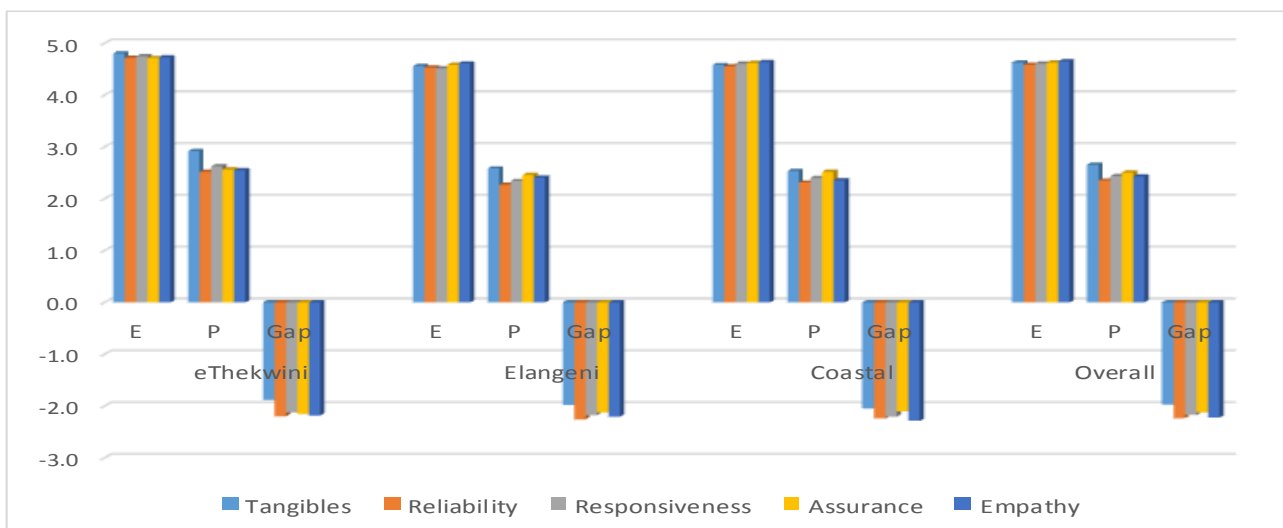
#### 4.5.2 FINDINGS ON THE PERCEIVED GAP BETWEEN CURRENT AND BEST ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES TO BOTH STUDENTS AND STAFF

One of the objectives of this study was to investigate the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to students, using strategies identified by SERVQUAL gaps, in three selected TVET colleges. Table 4.17 and Figure 4.9 illustrates the overall scoring dimension with five SERVQUAL determinants for this study.

**Table 4.17: The Overall Scoring by Dimension with Five SERVQUAL Determinants for the study**

Statements	eThekwini			Elangeni			Coastal			Overall		
	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap	E	P	Gap
Tangibles	4.8	2.9	-1.9	4.6	2.6	-2.0	4.6	2.5	-2.0	4.6	2.7	-2.0
Reliability	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.5	2.3	-2.3	4.6	2.3	-2.2	4.6	2.3	-2.2
Responsiveness	4.7	2.6	-2.1	4.5	2.3	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2
Assurance	4.7	2.6	-2.2	4.6	2.5	-2.1	4.6	2.5	-2.1	4.6	2.5	-2.1
Empathy	4.7	2.5	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.2	4.6	2.4	-2.3	4.6	2.4	-2.2

**Figure 4.9: Graph Depicting Results of all Five SERVQUAL Determinants for the Study**



As indicated in Figure 4.9, expectations were higher than perceptions, resulting in low quality in all five SERVQUAL dimensions. In terms of service quality, the physical and academic services relate to the appearance of the physical facilities as well as the ability to perform the promised service reliably and accurately (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Students form their own perceptions of the experienced service and it is important for higher education institutions to know exactly what these perceptions are, as this might lead to an increase of potential students in the future. Every individual student has specific expectations about a service; however, these are formed before the actual service takes place. Therefore, the perceptions they form after the actual service delivery are very important (Hefer and Cant, 2014:10).

#### **4.5.3 FINDINGS ON THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS IN DELIVERY OF GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

Questions were addressed during the interviews with administrative clerks. Hence, the aim and objectives were to investigate the system support provided by the administrative managers to the administrative clerks in delivering accurate academic Information for students. The following responses were obtained from administrative clerks.

##### **4.5.3.1 ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS' RESPONSES**

The following interview questions for administrative clerks were addressed. Responses are indicated below the question.

***Statement 1: Is the application system user friendly?***

Of the overall responses for statement one, 52.5 percent agreed that the system is user friendly, unless there is a power failure or the server is down, and 2.5 percent disagreed, indicating that continuous upgrades are needed. In support of statement 1, 2.5 percent of the respondents stated that, sometimes, they cannot change certain information because they do not have the authority to log onto the system and effect changes, especially once the time frame has elapsed.

**Statement 2:** *Are there any trainings/workshops for COLTECH software?*

55.0 percent stated that they have been trained on how to use the system and 12.5 percent stated that they get training once a year.

**Statement 3:** *What are the time frames for capturing academic information?*

42.5 percent stated that they do get training when there are upgrades, 55.0 percent stated they are given time frames to capture academic information that normally takes one to two months; and academic personnel information is captured every week during the months of registration, i.e, January to February.

**Statement 4:** *How manageable is the information that is captured on the application system?*

55.0 percent stated that information is manageable, especially within the given time frames.

**Statement 5:** *How flexible is communication with students on campus?*

55.0 percent stated that communication is flexible inside campus through notice boards.

**Statement 6:** *How quick is the rectification of errors in information captured?*

55.0 percent stated that rectification of errors is possible only during specified time frames.

**Statement 7:** *Is there any delay or non-rectification of captured information?*

37.5 percent agreed that there are no delays in rectification of errors during the given time frames, 12.5 percent stated that, for certain information, they do not have authority to change all the errors, and 42.5 percent stated that, when the server is down or the given time frame for capturing has elapsed (closed), they cannot rectify errors.

**Statement 8:** *Are there any recommendations or improvements that you suggest about administrative practices being offered to students?*

55 percent agreed that administrative clerks are providing quality administrative practices to students, 2.5 percent of administrative clerks would prefer to be given authority in order to rectify all errors as soon as possible for better service, and 10.0 percent stated that more staff members are required for speeding up the process for capturing academic information. 2.5 percent stated that returning students should only have to update information on the system if there are any changes and should not have to go through the same routines as first-year students for better service and speeding up the process, and 75 percent stated that online self-registration can speed up the process and access to their academic information can be flexible.

**Statement 9:** *Is the application system always accessible?*

55 percent agreed that the application system is always accessible during given time frames.

**Statement 10:** *Administrative managers are always supportive.*

52.5 percent stated that administrative managers are always supportive whereas 22.5 percent stated that there was a lack of communication when it comes to deadlines and rectifying those errors which needed to be rectified by administrative Managers, and 17.5 percent stated that administrative managers communicate most of the time.

#### **4.5.4 FINDINGS ON THE SYSTEM SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGERS TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS IN DELIVERING ACCURATE ACADEMIC INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

##### **4.5.4.1 RESPONSES BY ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGERS**

The following interview questions for administrative managers were addressed.

##### **Interview Questions for Administrative Managers**

**Statement 1:** *Are there any challenges in academic capturing of information?*

13.6 percent of administrative managers agreed that there are no challenges, and, if the information is accurately captured during given time frames, no challenges may occur.

**Statement 2:** *How accurate is the application system?*

A very low proportion of 4.5 percent agreed that the system COLTECH, which is in place, is very accurate and 13.6 percent indicated that, currently, TVET colleges are experiencing national problems when it comes to the accuracy of marks.

**Statement 3:** *How quick is the rectification of errors on information captured?*

13.6 percent agreed that rectification of errors is very quick and it takes a few seconds depending on the nature of the problem.

**Statement 4:** *Are the time frames fair for capturing academic information?*

13.6 percent agreed that information is captured only if it is submitted within the required time frames.

**Statement 5:** *Are there any special arrangements for students who experience challenges in their academic information due to system error?*

13.6 percent agreed that there are special arrangements for students who experience challenges in their academic information due to system error. There are special documents/forms that the candidate needs to fill in to correct certain academic information and they need to submit a portfolio of evidence if the nature of the error concerns results.

**Statement 6:** *Is there any flexibility in communicating with DHET about the challenges of the application system?*

55.0 percent agreed that they are flexible in communicating with DHET about the challenges of the application system, especially within time frames, and errors are rectified quickly.

**Statement 7:** *Are any trainings/workshops needed?*

13 percent agreed that trainings and workshops are conducted once a year or whenever there are upgrades on the system.

**Statement 8:** *How accessible is the application system?*

13.6 percent agreed that the system is always accessible, and the system is flexible and easy to use if there is no technical error or the server is not down.

**Statement 9:** *Are the administrative practices communicated well with students?*

13.6 percent agreed that administrative practitioners communicated well with students, and 9.1 percent agreed that communication is done through notices and communicating with lecturers.

**Statement 10:** *Is there any improvement that you can recommend to DHET about the application software being used to capture academic information for students?*

13.6 percent agreed that there is a need for improvement, and 4.5 percent recommended online self-service, proper monitoring of the system with the help of DHET specialists and giving administrative clerks authority to correct any type of error that may occur on the system. All questions were valid, indicating a high level of expectation regarding administrative practices' support, proper monitoring of the system by DHET and extending rights for administrative clerks to rectify errors on the system faster in order to close the gap that currently exists in TVET colleges.

#### **4.6 FACTOR ANALYSIS**

The matrix tables are preceded by a summarised table that reflects the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test. The requirement is that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy should be greater than 0.50 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity should be less than 0.05. In all instances, the conditions are satisfied which allows for the factor analysis procedure (Maïke, 2017:3).

Factor analysis is done only for the Likert scale items. Certain components divided into finer components. This is explained below in the rotated component matrix.

**Table 4.18: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test - Expectations</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.952
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6937.678
	df	210
	Sig.	0.000

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test - Perceptions</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.957
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4164.545
	df	210
	Sig.	0.000

All of the conditions are satisfied for factor analysis. That is, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value should be greater than 0.500 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity sig. value should be less than 0.05.

Factor analysis is a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction. A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors. With reference to Table 4.19, the principle component analysis was used as the extraction method, and the rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. This is an orthogonal rotation method that minimizes the number of variables that have high loadings on each factor. It simplifies the interpretation of the factors. Factor analysis/loading show inter-correlations between variables. Items of questions that loaded similarly imply measurement along a similar factor (Maïke, 2017:3). An examination of the content of items loading at or above 0.5 (and using the higher or highest loading in instances where items cross-loaded at greater than this value) effectively measured along the various components.



**Table 4.19: Rotated Component Matrix**

	Expectations					Perceptions				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
T1	0.113	0.315	0.345	0.661	0.218	0.024	0.123	0.760	0.279	0.122
T2	0.229	0.177	0.117	0.854	-0.007	0.208	0.233	0.717	0.054	0.022
T3	0.138	0.227	0.674	0.396	0.367	0.240	0.314	0.664	0.076	-0.013
T4	0.352	0.280	0.792	0.189	0.009	0.183	0.538	0.298	0.467	0.009
Rel5	0.387	0.558	0.599	0.105	-0.072	0.204	0.747	0.208	0.214	0.024
Rel6	0.292	0.696	0.238	0.250	-0.071	0.284	0.696	0.156	0.179	0.158
Rel7	0.309	0.690	0.226	0.245	0.150	0.300	0.613	0.207	0.161	0.196
Rel8	0.308	0.699	0.371	0.150	0.242	0.309	0.691	0.203	0.140	0.044
Res9	0.310	0.614	0.106	0.222	0.519	0.493	0.498	0.275	-0.058	0.178
Res10	0.461	0.548	0.216	0.221	0.308	0.459	0.415	0.261	0.252	0.229
Res11	0.561	0.610	0.102	0.143	-0.027	0.299	0.485	0.133	0.544	0.095
Res12	0.505	0.516	0.297	0.213	0.054	0.339	0.364	0.158	0.661	0.153
A13	0.594	0.502	0.172	0.134	0.230	0.417	0.086	0.321	0.604	0.229
A14	0.650	0.447	0.200	0.058	0.224	0.603	0.137	0.319	0.220	0.267
A15	0.646	0.491	0.180	0.114	0.223	0.124	0.184	0.063	0.148	0.891
A16	0.745	0.326	0.311	0.083	0.098	0.745	0.237	0.239	-0.018	0.169
E17	0.781	0.323	0.214	0.162	0.075	0.774	0.222	0.051	0.223	-0.023
E18	0.828	0.270	0.170	0.106	0.071	0.695	0.311	0.085	0.341	-0.037
E19	0.777	0.250	0.056	0.219	-0.195	0.685	0.256	0.071	0.376	-0.107
E20	0.778	0.217	0.230	0.226	0.210	0.659	0.329	0.108	0.136	0.135
E21	0.704	0.125	0.185	0.107	0.457	0.558	0.237	0.189	0.302	0.152

It is noted that the variables that constituted Empathy loaded perfectly along a single component for both Expectations (E) and Perceptions (P). This means that the statements that constituted this dimension perfectly measured what they set out to measure. Reliability for Perceptions and Responsiveness for Expectations also loaded perfectly. The remaining dimensions loaded across components, implying that respondents identified overlapping trends in dimensions.

## 4.7 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The traditional approach to reporting a result requires a statement of statistical significance. A **p-value** is generated from a **test statistic**. A significant result is indicated with "p < 0.05". These values are highlighted with a \*. A second Chi square test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables (rows vs columns). The null hypothesis states that there is no association between the two. The alternate hypothesis indicates that there is an association (Maïke, 2017:4). Table 4.20 illustrates the results of the chi square tests.

**Table 4.20: Test for Significant relationship between the variables**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
T_E_1	7,922	2	0,019
T_P_1	14,669	2	0,001
T_G_1	8,489	2	0,014
T_E_2	6,745	2	0,034
T_P_2	3,455	2	0,178
T_G_2	5,345	2	0,069
T_E_3	11,501	2	0,003
T_P_3	8,903	2	0,012
T_G_3	2,743	2	0,254
T_E_4	8,067	2	0,018
T_P_4	14,898	2	0,001
T_G_4	4,401	2	0,111
Rel_E_5	4,905	2	0,086
Rel_P_5	7,895	2	0,019
Rel_G_5	2,766	2	0,251
Rel_E_6	11,768	2	0,003
Rel_P_6	0,412	2	0,814
Rel_G_6	0,022	2	0,989
Rel_E_7	8,992	2	0,011
Rel_P_7	0,955	2	0,620
Rel_G_7	1,187	2	0,552
Rel_E_8	5,042	2	0,080
Rel_P_8	8,240	2	0,016
Rel_G_8	4,198	2	0,123
Res_E_9	8,628	2	0,013
Res_P_9	1,212	2	0,546

Res_G_9	2,129	2	0,345
Res_E_10	8,862	2	0,012
Res_P_10	3,646	2	0,162
Res_G_10	1,257	2	0,533
Res_E_11	6,811	2	0,033
Res_P_11	9,921	2	0,007
Res_G_11	3,399	2	0,183
Res_E_12	11,413	2	0,003
Res_P_12	1,876	2	0,391
Res_G_12	0,035	2	0,983
A_E_13	8,950	2	0,011
A_P_13	4,476	2	0,107
A_G_13	1,103	2	0,576
A_E_14	3,909	2	0,142
A_P_14	1,243	2	0,537
A_G_14	1,939	2	0,379
A_E_15	6,913	2	0,032
A_P_15	2,429	2	0,297
A_G_15	0,609	2	0,737
A_E_16	3,342	2	0,188
A_P_16	0,003	2	0,999
A_G_16	0,457	2	0,796
E_E_17	2,222	2	0,329
E_P_17	0,733	2	0,693
E_G_17	0,342	2	0,843
E_E_18	7,483	2	0,024
E_P_18	2,066	2	0,356
E_G_18	0,458	2	0,795
E_E_19	5,163	2	0,076
E_P_19	2,891	2	0,236
E_G_19	0,813	2	0,666
E_E_20	4,425	2	0,109
E_P_20	2,129	2	0,345
E_G_20	1,875	2	0,392
E_E_21	4,408	2	0,110
E_P_21	0,450	2	0,798
E_G_21	0,087	2	0,958

For example: The p-value between “Gender” and “T\_P\_1” (Tangibles\_Perception\_1) (1 = Statement 1 = The physical facilities are visually appealing administration venues) is 0.001. This means that there is a significant relationship between the variables highlighted in yellow.

That is, the gender of the respondent did play a significant role in terms of how respondents perceived the appeal of the physical facility. All values without an \* (or p-values more than 0.05) do not have a significant relationship.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

Numerous types of analyses were conducted and the results were presented in the form of graphs and tables in order to provide a holistic picture of the results. The next chapter will discuss the results of this study in relation to the literature review. The participants' responses will be interpreted in order to deduce the implications of their answers and recommendations will also be made.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF MAIN RESULTS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The intention of this discussion chapter is to integrate the research findings with the literature and previous studies. The aim of this study was to determine the expectations and perceptions of students and administrative staff regarding administrative practices in three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu–Natal.

The main findings of the study will be highlighted, as well as the implications of the findings for evaluation of administrative practices in three selected KwaZulu-Natal Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges. The chapter follows a similar structure to the questionnaire and interview data analyses.

### **5.2 MAIN FINDINGS**

#### **5.2.1 DISCUSSION ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

The findings of the study agree with previous studies that adopted a SERVQUAL framework as it also focuses on trying to understand customers' expectations adequately. These factors describe administrative clerks' ability to influence the students as a way to deliver good administrative practices at TVET colleges. This involves fulfilling promises, willingness in sharing knowledge and competency of service administrative clerks in answering specific students' queries and requests, providing and creating a warm atmosphere while dealing with (students), making students feel comfortable while receiving services, portraying a good image of the TVET colleges and delivering prompt service (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013:16).

It is noted that the expected scores are larger than the perceived scores. This divergence has resulted in gaps. Gaps larger than 2 are considered significant. The results indicated high Likert scores for expectations, which resulted in negative values for service quality of administrative practices in three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal.

### **5.2.1.1 TANGIBLES**

The results indicate that students' overall average Likert score was 4.6. This score specified that students' expectations were very high regarding Tangibles when it comes to administrative practices. The Likert score for perception was 2.7, which was very low regarding the tangibles dimension of service quality, as identified by the SERVQUAL average Gap score of -2.0. The results indicated that the statements that constituted this dimension perfectly measured what they set out to measure.

As far as tangible and intangible services are concerned, service quality is important because it affects students' decisions as well as the institution's performance itself since the level of satisfaction with the service quality within sectors undermines the demonstration of their education context (Pohyae, Romle, Saleh, and Saleh, 2016:491). Hence, the statements for tangibles indicated low service quality in administrative practices at TVET colleges.

However, in today's competitive academic environment, where students have many options available to them, factors that enable educational institutions to attract and retain students should be seriously studied. Higher education institutions, which want to gain a competitive edge in the future, may need to begin searching for effective and creative ways to attract, retain and foster stronger relationships with students (Azleen, Rahida and Mohd, 2008:163).

### **5.2.1.2 RELIABILITY**

The result indicated that most students' overall average Likert score is 2.2. This score implies that students expect administrative clerks to keep promises, to show a sincere interest in solving queries, to perform the service correctly the first time, and provide the service at the promised time. Most students' perceptions were very low in all four reliability statements of administrative practice. These results indicated low quality.

The findings concur with Yusuf (2013:39), who stated that a discrepancy between the service promise and service delivery is often mainly due to inaccurate communication gained from advertisements and exhibitions. Many organisations tend to oversell their services, resulting in over-extended promises, and should believe that delivering a service and meeting commitments timeously, in keeping with the promised service timelines in a professional manner, will influence a customer's perception in a significant way.

Employees at the institution should perform the desired service level correctly the first time. It also means the organisation keeps its promises within the specific time frame set out. If this delivery is done in an efficient manner, it will enhance the perceived quality of the customer. Of all the dimensions of service quality, reliability is the most important factor in the customers' assessment of service quality. Reliability influences the assessment of other quality dimensions (Yusuf, 2013:38). As for administrative practices at TVET colleges, administrative clerks were identified to be unreliable for administrative practices.

Hence administrative clerks were found to be unreliable in delivering good administrative practices to students, hence reliability is the most important factor in customers' assessment of service quality and can create bad influences on the assessment of other service quality dimensions.

### **5.2.1.3 RESPONSIVENESS**

The results indicated that most students' overall Likert score of 4.6 in all four Responsiveness statements indicated that students' expectations are very high regarding responsiveness of administrative clerks. A Likert score of 2.4 shows that students' perceptions were very low regarding the responsiveness of administrative clerks and identified a gap that exists -2.2, which indicated low quality.

The findings of the study are in line with the study conducted by Anil and Icli (2014:34) that there has to be a willingness to assist customers and to provide prompt service on a continuous basis. Sometimes, this service may take place out of normal operating hours. This dimension focuses on attentiveness and willingness in dealing with customer requests, queries and prompt complaint resolution.

According to Yousapronpaiboon, (2014:108) responsiveness and good quality information services are about helping users define and satisfy their information needs, building their confidence in using information retrieval systems and making the whole activity of administrative practices a pleasurable experience. Hence administrative clerks are the centre of information, their willingness to assist is very vital and providing prompt service on a continuous basis

As indicated in chapter two by Anil and Icli (2014:34), responsiveness can be defined as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. SERVQUAL strongly emphasises the process of service delivery rather than the outcomes or end result of the service encounter. From an operational perspective, consumers evaluate service quality on the basis of both standards and expectations and it is basically impossible to capture the variation of each service quality dimension by four or five items (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

The findings of the study agrees with Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985) that, to excel on the dimension of responsiveness, an organisation must be certain to view the process of service delivery and the handling of requests from the customer's perspective rather than from the company's perspective. Furthermore, TVET colleges should provide prompt and efficient systems for registrations, formative and summative results, issuing of certificates with correct academic information. Following the work of Green (2013), in order to distinguish themselves, the colleges require well-staffed administrative practice service departments as well as responsive front-line people on all contact positions.

#### **5.2.1.4 ASSURANCE**

The results show that most students' overall average Likert score was 4.6, which indicated that students' expectations were very high regarding assurance of administrative practices by administrative clerks as opposed to a low perception score of 2.5. The average SERVQUAL gap within this dimension was -2.1 in all three colleges. In a higher education institution, the key individuals that link the customer to the company would be the academic and frontline staff.



The institution must provide the assurance that employees have the ability to convey trust and confidence. To this end, an institution with a strong brand can communicate trust and confidence. The assessment of service quality depends, to a large extent, on how customers perceive the actual performance based on their expectation (Yavuz and Deniz, 2016:98).

Findings of this dimension are in line with the study conducted Sultan *et al.*, (2013:83) who claim that assurance is central to services since customers are confronted with a high level of risk or uncertainty about their ability to evaluate outcomes. The authors believe that assurance represents courtesy, credibility and competence on the part of employees, and advocate that assurance is associated with the institution's ability to provide the service, mainly in terms of their knowledge.

#### **5.2.1.5 EMPATHY**

Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) are of the opinion that higher education institutions and their employees must try to understand the customers' problems and strive to carry out duties with the customers' best interests in mind, and believe that there is a greater need for managers to be customer-oriented by showing a human dimension to their interaction with customers. Listening, understanding and communicating with the customer forms the foundation of empathy, e.g., students should be addressed by names and not by student numbers. Such personal attention makes the student feel special (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

The results show that the overall average expectation score was 4.6 indicating that expectations were very high regarding empathy when it comes to administrative practices. The findings agree with previous studies by Pohyae *et al.*, (2016:497) who found that student perceptions of service quality in higher education are not directly involved with the content as higher educational institutions need to have and deliver course units, but they are involved with strategies to influence and retain their students, in which case they need to display empathy.

## **5.2.2 DISCUSSION ON THE PERCEIVED GAP BETWEEN CURRENT AND BEST PRACTICES REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES TO BOTH STUDENTS AND STAFF**

In terms of service quality, the physical and academic services relate to the appearance of the physical facilities as well as the ability to perform the promised service reliably and accurately (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Students form their own perceptions of the experienced service and it is important for higher education institutions to know exactly what these perceptions are, as this might lead to an increase of potential students in the future. Every individual student has specific expectations about a service. However, these are formed before the actual service takes place. Therefore, the perceptions they form after the actual service delivery are very important (Hefer and Cant, 2014:10).

These findings agree with previous studies conducted by other researchers (Singh and Kumar, 2016:10) that provided lists of quality determinants that define service quality.

### **5.2.2.1 TANGIBLES**

The appearance of physical facilities, such as the professional appearance of academic and support staff and communication materials, is central to providing a total educational experience. Tangibles, such as the facilities, equipment and personal appearance of staff at the institution, provide physical representations that customers will use to evaluate service quality; the learning experience and orientation cannot be entirely evaluated by grades alone. Most institutions use tangibles in conjunction with the other service quality dimensions to develop a service quality strategy for the organisation (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). The findings concur with Ngibe (2015:30) that service quality gap signifies that the perceived or experienced service is not consistent with the expected service, resulting in service of a negatively confirmed quality and a quality problem, bad word-of-mouth reports, leading to a negative impact on the corporate image and potential loss of business.

The study also corroborates with Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) that, since customer satisfaction can be influenced by the image or reputation of an organization, it is important for the company to have visually appealing service materials and for the company to have appealing physical facilities. Customer satisfaction and service quality are leading components in the system of external relations of each organization, as, today, they largely determine its competitiveness. The desire to manage relationships with customers leads to the fact that organizations are starting to pay attention to the development and implementation of service standards. Reviewing standards of customer service, as part of the corporate culture of the organization, allows for the finding of more effective approaches to its development and implementation (Asya, 2013:2).

#### **5.2.2.2 RELIABILITY**

The results of this dimension agree with Yusuf (2012:39) that reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. SERVQUAL is based on the underlying premise that service quality can be defined as the extent to which a service meets or exceeds customers' needs or expectations. Furthermore, this dimension focuses on attentiveness and willingness in dealing with customer requests, queries and prompt complaint resolution. The five dimensions of service quality state that information service is about helping users define and satisfy their information needs, building their confidence in using information retrieval systems and making the whole activity of administrative practices a pleasurable experience (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

#### **5.2.2.3 RESPONSIVENESS**

It is noted that expected scores are larger than perceived score for the responsiveness dimension, as indicated with Likert scores of 4.5 – 4.8 in all three TVET colleges. The overall Likert Score Gap (-2.2), as it shown Table 4.8, indicates low quality and that students are not satisfied with all responsiveness statements, as follows:

Administrative clerks always inform students exactly when the administrative services will be offered (Res9): Administrative clerks gives prompt service to students; (Res10): All administrative clerks are always willing to help customers; (Res11): All administrative clerks are never too busy to respond to a student's request (Res12).

Findings of this dimension concur with Hossein *et al.*, (2011:234) that student satisfaction and service quality attributes, such as responsiveness, competence, credibility and communication, are significant determinants of service quality for the business institutes. The most basic distinguishing characteristic of services is intangibility, because services are performances or actions rather than objects; they cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the same manner that one can sense tangible goods. Services are often produced and consumed at the same time, and mass production is difficult. The quality of service and customer satisfaction will be highly dependent on what happens in 'real time', including the actions of employees and the interactions between employees and customers.

#### **5.2.2.4 ASSURANCE**

It is noted that expected scores are larger than the perceived scores for the assurance dimension, as indicated with Likert scores of 4.5 – 4.8 in all three TVET colleges. The overall Likert score gap (-2.1), as it shown Table 4.11, indicates low quality and that students are not satisfied with all assurance statements, as follows:

The behaviour of administrative clerks instil confidence to students (A13); Students feel safe in their enquires with administrative clerks (A14); Administrative clerks are consistently courteous with students enquiries (A15); Administrative clerks have knowledge to students' questions (A16). The findings are in agreement with Sultan (2013:20) that assurance relates to the ability of staff to provide a courteous and secure service, and constitutes employees' knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence in the customer. This dimension is central to services since customers: are confronted with a high level of risk or uncertainty about their ability to evaluate outcomes;

Believe that assurance represents courtesy, credibility and competence on the part of employees; and advocate that assurance is associated with the institution's ability to provide the service, mainly in terms of their knowledge.

#### **5.2.2.5 EMPATHY**

It is noted that expected scores are larger than the perceived scores for the empathy dimension, as indicated with Likert scores of 4.5 – 4.8 in all three TVET colleges. The overall Likert score gap (-2.2), as it shown Table 4.14, indicated low quality and that students are not satisfied with all Empathy statements, as follows: Administrative clerks give each student individual attention request (E17); Administrative clerks have the best interest at heart to help students (E18); Administrative clerks gives each student personal attention (E19); Administrative clerks understand the specific needs of each student (E20); and Administrative service hours are convenient to students (E21).

The way the customer perceives the service process at the time of the service is more important than the outcome of the service (Singh *et al.*, 2016:20). Empathy is the level of caring and individualised attention the firm provides to its customers. Yusuf *et al.* (2012:37) conclude that the shift to the knowledge economy has brought education in all its forms (pre-school, primary school, secondary school, higher education, vocational training, and adult education) back into focus.

Education has, for years, been a 'commodity' spurning big and small businesses. Now education is big business. Higher education can contribute to the economy. Higher educational institutions that adopt quality culture as their philosophy will strive to achieve excellence in service quality and students' satisfaction (Yusuf *et al.*, 2012:39).

### **5.2.3 DISCUSSION ON THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS IN DELIVERING GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

The increased competition among academic organizations regarding student recruitment and understanding exactly what students expect is the most crucial step in defining and delivering a high-quality education service. Quality service has received considerable attention in today's academic perspective backed by the complexities and interaction of providing services (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

All statements were valid. Of the overall responses for statement one, 52.5 percent agreed that the system is user friendly, unless there is a power failure or the server is down, and 2.5 percent disagreed, indicating that continuous upgrades are needed. In supported answers for all statements, 2.5 percent of respondents stated that, sometimes, they cannot change certain information because they do not have authority to log into the system and change this information, especially once the time frame has elapsed.

The staff at the institution must be willing and ready to serve and help students. It is vital that the administrative clerks at the TVET colleges are knowledgeable about the service they represent. Whether the interaction occurs face-to face or telephonically, the degree to which the service personnel exhibit the ability to handle such matters effectively, and whether they care about attending to the customers' (students') requests, expectations will undoubtedly impact on perceptions of service quality (Fariba *et al.*, 2013:116).

The findings of this study are in line with a previous study conducted by Asya (2013:2), who found that the willingness to assist customers and to provide prompt service on a continuous basis may sometimes take place outside of the ambit of normal operating hours. All of the statements have modal responses of "valid", meaning that the expectations of the respondents, as far as system and administrative practice commitment to serve students (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

Namely, tangible, reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness, required excellence in administrative practice service output (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

#### **5.2.4 DISCUSSION ON THE SYSTEM SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGERS TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS IN DELIVERING ACCURATE ACADEMIC INFORMATION TO STUDENTS**

As TVET colleges become more student-oriented, students' perceptions of higher educational facilities and services are becoming more important. In order to make the institution progressive and effective, knowledge of students' expectations, academic preferences and quality perception about the educational environment should be borne in mind by the higher authorities of the institution. Students, who are at a higher academic level, i.e., studying in a higher educational institution, seek more quality education and perfection of the system at their place of study because it satisfies their esteem and equips them with all the essentials and capabilities they require to be an effective educational personalities (Malik *et al.*, 2010:2).

In terms of the overall responses from administrative managers, 13.6 percent agreed that there are no challenges, and that, if the information is accurately captured during given time frames, no challenges will occur. 4.5 percent agreed that the COLTECH system, which is in place, is very accurate, and 13.6 percent indicated that, currently, all TVET colleges are experiencing national problems when it comes to the accuracy of marks. 13.6 percent of the overall respondents agreed that rectification of errors is very quick and it takes a few seconds, depending on the nature of the problem, and 13.6 percent agreed that information is captured only if it is submitted within the required time frames. 13.6 percent of the overall respondents agreed that there are special arrangements for students who experience challenges in their academic information due to system error.

There are specific documents/forms that candidates need to complete to correct certain academic information and they need to submit a portfolio of evidence if the nature of the error concerns results.

According to Hefer *et al.* (2014:4), perceived quality is a predictor of consumer satisfaction, while other authors see satisfaction as a straightforward predictor of perceived quality. Many studies have suggested that satisfaction is the result of excellent service quality and assumed value. Consequently, it can be said that service quality and perceived value are prerequisites for consumer satisfaction. Customer service is considered to be an integral part of any facet of industry and it defines the future of any organization. The rapid advances in technology-based systems related to the internet are leading to fundamental ways in how different organizations interact. This applies equally to the relationships of an organization with its customers. In different service industries, the relationship between customer satisfaction and service attributes has been difficult to identify because the nature of services is intangible (Sara, 2013:1).

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

Chapter five discussed the main results of the research. All the findings were consistent with the theories and findings of previous studies reviewed in the literature. The main overall finding was on the evaluation of administrative practice and results indicated that administrative practice does have a positive effect on students' perceptions and expectations. The next chapter concludes the study by highlighting the main limitations, and also provides recommendations for future research and the direction that this future research may take.



## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Six presents the conclusion of the study and recommendations for evaluation of the administrative practices in three selected Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as how each research aim and objective of the study was addressed.

### **6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **6.2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

As expectations were higher than perceptions in all five SERVQUAL dimensions of service quality regarding administrative practices, it is safe to say that TVET colleges should constantly provide quality administrative practices to students, to the extent that they can be seen as ‘customers’.

As the level of satisfaction increases, the greater will be the level of students’ grooming their skills development, course knowledge and mentality. Satisfaction is the resultant outcome of an institution’s administrative as well as the educational system’s coherent performance. Students will be more satisfied and motivated to complete their studies if the institution provides an environment which facilitates learning, i.e., if the institution contains the proper infrastructure for educational function combined with essential parameters of professional and academic development. The perceived quality is defined as one’s justification about the excellence of a product or service (Malik *et al.*, 2010:10).

In particular, it is crucial that students’ expectations and perceptions are properly measured and correctly understood and that, from the perspective of students, the objectives critical to quality service criteria and sub-criteria are properly identified. In fact, the objectives should be taken into the design process to effectively support the decision maker in identifying suitable “Gaps oriented” service improvement solutions

(Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Singh *et al.* (2016:20) agree that service quality is the customers' judgement of overall excellence of the service or the difference between customers' expectation and the actual service performed or perceived.

As expectations were higher than perceptions in all five SERVQUAL dimensions of service quality regarding administrative practices, it is safe to say that TVET colleges should constantly provide quality administrative practices to students, to the extent that they can be seen as 'customers'. Like any other service industry, education is designed to meet the needs and wants of the users of its services. However, it is different from most other services in two ways. Education is a 'pure service' for there is no physical product involved. This means that the quality of the service is grounded in the responsiveness, dialogue and relationships that exist between relevant stakeholders. Education is unlike other types of services, such as retailing or catering, that focus on the interaction between a single provider and a consumer. Students receiving an education are not the only beneficiaries, even though they are the primary consumers; there are other stakeholders, such as parents, prospective employers and society as a whole, who all have an interest in how successful and appropriate the level of education is in meeting the needs of the student (Ong, 2013:10; Green, 2013).

Abdullah *et al.* (2013:14) proposed five critical factors of public sector service quality as perceived by the citizens, namely, in order of importance: systemization, employee-oriented, assurance, hospitality and efficiency. An understanding of how these various dimensions impact on overall service quality would ultimately enable the public sector to improve and efficiently design a service delivery process that would meet the expectations of citizens.

### **6.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE PERCEIVED GAP BETWEEN CURRENT AND BEST PRACTICES REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES TO BOTH STUDENTS AND STAFF**

It is vitally important for all TVET colleges to implement an appropriate set of processes for the administrative practices and to continuously review and refine students' expectations and perceptions regarding these processes.

The results of this study clearly indicated that there was a huge gap in administrative practices in these three TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal based on students' expectations and perceptions. Greater emphasis on improving the quality of service will increase awareness, improve the perception of the TVET system in polytechnics as well as achieve the transformation plan. It will also lead to the sustainability of the TVET system in this country (Hussein *et al.*, 2015:33). The gap between expectations and perceptions of the results from the study indicate that there is a need for student administrative practices' improvements to be implemented. It is recommended that all administrative clerks in TVET colleges be continuously trained in service quality programmes, i.e., customers' service improvement workshops, system knowledge workshops, communication workshops and be given authority to rectify all errors in the system.

As identified in Figure 4.9 in chapter four, the overall SERVQUAL gap scoring indicated significantly higher levels of agreement for expectations than for perceptions. It is noted that the expected scores are larger than the perceived scores. This has resulted in gaps. Gaps larger than 2 are considered significant. It is observed that many of the statements are close to the value of 2 (1.7 – 1.9). Students' expectations were very high in all five SERVQUAL dimensions in all three TVET colleges, which indicated that administrative practices have to be reviewed.

In order to improve administrative practices in TVET colleges, it is necessary to regularly evaluate administrative practices, and students' expectations and perceptions, considering the SERVQUAL theory framework for service quality, using the five attributes of evaluating service quality (tangible, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, assurance and empathy), and close the gaps that currently exist.

Service quality in the educational sector, particularly in the higher educational institutions, is the fundamental aspect of educational excellence. When students perceive that the institution's quality and standardized learning environment is provided together with intellectual capacity, and appropriate facilities of learning and infrastructure, their interest in the organization will undoubtedly be retained.

The students are motivated by the academic as well as the administrative efficiency of their institution. The maintenance of other essentials of quality service in education, with administrative staff cooperation, plays a vital role in educational support. Development of both academic and administrative issues of an institution are extremely important in determining the performance of students, development of organizational image and quality assurance (Malik, 2010:3).

### **6.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS IN DELIVERING GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

Primary data were collected via prepared questions for the interviews, to the administrative clerks in order to determine the challenges faced by administrative clerks in delivering good administrative practices. The findings are in line with previous studies discussed in the literature review, which found that quality at TVET colleges needs workshops of reputable standards, regular investment in new equipment, quality trainers and leaders, and the maintenance and repair of existing equipment (Sara, 2013:18). Therefore, it is recommended that all administrative managers in TVET colleges must focus their attention on administrative practice resources, purchase of new equipment, e.g., computers, and ensure that the facilities that students utilize are well maintained and visually appealing.

In order to deliver total student satisfaction, all employees of institutions of higher learning should adhere to principles of quality customer service. Whether they are front-line contact staff involved in teaching or administration, or non-contact staff in management or administrative roles, contact personnel are the most influential factor in students' evaluation of service delivery and have a direct impact on students' satisfaction (Ong, 2013:11). Subsequently, the majority of administrative clerks (99.4 percent) agreed with the statements, indicating a high level of expectation regarding administrative practices' support and rights that authorised administrative clerks to rectify errors on the system faster, with flexibility in time frames, and that confirmation of marks and academic information, at any time during the academic year for students, would be helpful.

#### **6.2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE SYSTEM SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGERS TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE CLERKS IN DELIVERING ACCURATE ACADEMIC INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

Data were collected via prepared questions for the interviews, and given to the administrative managers in keeping with one of the study's objectives, which was to determine system support by the administrative managers to the administrative clerks in delivering accurate academic information for students at the three selected TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal.

Results indicated a high level of expectation regarding administrative practices support, proper monitoring of the application of COLTECH by DHET and extending authority for administrative clerks to rectify errors on the system faster in order to close the gap that currently exists in TVET colleges. Therefore, it is recommended that, for faster administrative practices, and online self-service, proper monitoring of the system with the help of DHET specialists and giving administrative clerks authority to correct any type of error that may occur on the system faster should be implemented.

A higher education institution is similar to other businesses in that it needs to satisfy its primary customers (the students) in order to survive, develop, and sustain a competitive edge within its business environment. This similarity supports the idea of considering education institutions as 'customer-driven entities', largely because customer-driven organisations are more effective in their commitment to satisfying customers' (students') needs. The success of institutions and universities will increasingly be determined by how well they satisfy their customers. Successful ones will be those that clearly identify their mission and satisfy the students they serve. Consequently, it is imperative for universities to clearly identify the different students they serve and their corresponding needs (Azleen *et al.*, 2008:165).

Education has, for a long time, been recognised as a vehicle to achieve change, create new ideas and initiate new practices that move a country towards increasing prosperity. Higher education institutions are educating those individuals who will

create and shape the future, as well as informing today's world. This makes the role of higher education more crucial in the current rapidly changing environment. Therefore, higher education institutions have a responsibility to several stakeholders (Ong, 2013:207). Students' perception of TVET colleges' image is important as it summarises students' insights of the standing of TVET colleges in the market. Since a TVET college's image is a guide to and a simple way for a student to evaluate its programmes, services offered and overall value in the market, it is important to know whether students' trust contributes towards a TVET college's image (Manuel, 2013:15).

### **6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was only limited to third-year students as those students were mostly exposed to the quality of service rendered at the TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. The research was conducted on a small scale, although 378 questionnaires were returned. An even larger sample size would have provided a greater insight; however, this was not possible due to financial and time constraints. Although the study adopted a mixed methods approach, it would be interesting to investigate the research problem purely from a qualitative perspective. The next section proposes recommendations for future research.

### **6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH**

It is recommended that continuous research be applied to all TVET colleges in South Africa using the five SERVQUAL dimensions covered in this study, as a vital input to the quality assurance programmes at the colleges, thereby enabling management and administrative clerks' insight into changes they need to effect and improve administrative practices' services and student satisfaction. It is also recommended that SERVQUAL be used to assess the performance within TVET colleges. Students' satisfaction, as the desired outcome of a task or job that pleases one's esteem, is defined as the wilful accomplishment which results in one's contentment. Thus satisfaction plays a major role in determining the originality and accuracy of a system, especially the educational system (Malik *et al.*, 2010:10).

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

The objectives of this study were to determine the expectations and perceptions of students regarding administrative practices; to identify challenges experienced by administrative clerks in delivering good administrative practices; and to investigate the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and staff using strategies identified by SERVQUAL gaps. The perceived quality is defined as one's opinion about the excellence of a product or service. The results of the relevant research questions were presented with conclusions based on the findings discussed in chapter four and discussion of the analysis in chapter five. The results demonstrated that, in each of the five SERVQUAL dimensions, there was a negative quality administrative practice gap. Negative administrative practice quality service gaps indicate that responsibilities have not been sufficiently fulfilled to meet students' expectations. The results of this study will provide great insight for management of the TVET colleges in addressing service quality of administrative practices.

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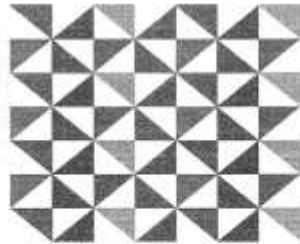
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## APPENDIX A: Institutional Research Ethics Clearance Letter



**Institutional Research Ethics Committee**  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
Room MS 49, Mansfield School Site  
Gate B, Risson Campus  
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2900

Fax: 031 373 2407

Email: [lavishad@dut.ac.za](mailto:lavishad@dut.ac.za)

[http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional\\_research\\_ethics](http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics)

[www.dut.ac.za](http://www.dut.ac.za)

11 September 2015

IREC Reference Number: **REC 40/15**

Ms N M Mpanza  
G702  
Ntuzuma  
16 Maphitha Road  
4359

Dear Ms Mpanza

**Evaluation of Administrative Practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal**

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Yours Sincerely,



Professor M N Sibya  
Deputy Chairperson: IREC



## **APPENDIX B: Permission Letter from Elangeni TVET College**



**higher education  
& training**  
Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**Elangeni  
College**  
Technical and Vocational  
Education and Training

An ISO 9001 and OSHAS 18001 certified organisation.

10 April 2015

Ms N.M Mpanza

Dear Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR USING COLLEGE AS SITE OF RESEARCH

Your email dated 8 April 2015 refers:

Elangeni College has no objection to you using our campuses as sites of research for an evaluation of administrative practices.

However, the following conditions for external research apply:

The college will have the right to approve content with regard to research instruments and research analysis.

- The relevant documents must be forwarded to the Rector and approval of usage will be given by the Rector in writing
- The name of the college or any of its sites cannot be used in any documents.
- The name/s of staff employed by the college cannot be used.
- The use of any findings that reflect negatively on the College, its partners or any - related body must be approved in writing by the Rector.

Please note that failure to comply with all of the above conditions will result in the necessary legal action being taken against you.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated

Yours sincerely



## APPENDIX C: Permission Letter from EThekwini TVET College



higher education  
& training  
Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**Enquiries: PA to the Principal**  
**Imibuzo: Ms N Dlamini**  
**Navrae:**

**Telephone: 031 250 8400**  
**Fax Number: 031 250 8404**  
**Address:**

**Date: 29/07/2015**  
**Usuku:**  
**Datum:**

Ms. Nomzamo Monica Mpanza

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR USING COLLEGE AS SITE OF RESEARCH

Thekwini TVET College has no objection to you using our campuses as sites of research for an Investigation into the Evaluation of Administrative Practices.

However, the following conditions for external research apply:

- The College will have right to approve content with regard to research instruments and research analysis.
  - The relevant documents must be forwarded to the College Principal and approval of usage will be given by the College Principal in writing.
- The name of the College or any of its sites cannot be used in any documents
- The name/s of staff employed by the college cannot be used.
- The use of any findings that reflect negatively on the College, its partners or any related body must be approved in writing by the College Principal.

Please note that the failure to comply with all of the above conditions will result in the necessary legal action against you.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted Signature]

Mr. S Mhlongo

Acting Principal

I have read the content of this letter and I accept the conditions

[Redacted Name]

[Redacted Signature]

31/07/15

NAME

SIGNATURE

DATE

## **APPENDIX D: Permission Letter from Coastal TVET College**



higher education  
& training  
Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

50051 Old Main Road, KwaMakhutha - P O Box 1795, Amanzimtoti, 4126  
Tel: (031) 905 7000/1 • Fax: (031) 905 1399 • Email: cao.ckzcao@feta.gov.za  
www.coastalkzn.co.za



**TO:** Ms NM Mpanza

**SUBJECT:** PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

Dear Ms Mpanza

This letter serves to confirm that permission is hereby granted for you to conduct a study at Coastal KZN TVET College as outlined below:

**TOPIC:** Evaluation of Administrative Practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, namely: Elangeni TVET College, Coastal TVET College and EThekweni TVET College.

**INSTITUTION:** Durban University of Technology

**COURSE:** Master of Technology in Commercial Administration

**PROPOSED DATE FOR DATA COLLECTION:** September 2015 to June 2016

We wish you all the best for this project.

Thank you

[REDACTED]  
SB Ndlovu

Principal: Coastal KZN TVET College

4 September 2015

## **APPENDIX E: Letter of Information**



**Dear Respondent:** Thank you for showing interest in this study. It has been undertaken in order to evaluate administrative practices of the TVET Colleges in KwaZulu – Natal. This questionnaire and Interview questions will take roughly 10-15 minutes to complete. Your input is sincerely appreciated

**Title of the Research Study:** Evaluation of Administrative Practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal.

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Nomzamo Monica Mpanza – MTech: Commercial Administration.

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Dr P. Green - Senior Lecturer and Head of Department Finance and Information Management - PhD; MBA; Mtech; PG Dip: Mgt; HDE. Dr N. Sentoo – Senior Lecturer; PhD.

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:** Evaluation of Administrative Practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, namely: Elangeni TVET College, Coastal KZN TVET College and EThekweni TVET College. Further Education and Training Colleges (TVET) in South Africa were identified by the democratically elected government which came into power in 1994 as one of the institutions that should play a central role in the process of skilling and re-skilling of the people of South Africa. Further Education and Training Colleges (TVET) were renamed to Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVET) in 2014 (Nzimande 2015:1). The mandate given to TVET by the government was to equip the South African society with the relevant and responsive skills needed by local businesses and industries especially in the intermediate phase such as artisans and other vocational skills (Dlamini 2014:10).

The effective and efficient functioning of TVET Colleges is pertinent to the development of critical, scarce and intermediate skills for the South African labour

market. One of the focus areas of the TVET Colleges Act (2006) is quality assurance systems; these include the evaluation of the performance of information systems as a key performance indicator of organisational success (Visser 2011:2).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate administrative practices on three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) in KwaZulu-Natal. In order to achieve this aim the following objectives will be addressed: To determine the expectations of students regarding administrative practices, To determine the perceptions of students regarding administrative practices, To identify challenges experienced by administrative clerks in delivering good administrative practices, To investigate the perceived gap between current and best practices regarding administrative practices to both students and staff using strategies identified by SERVQUAL gaps.

**Outline of the Procedures:** Traditionally, the population of this study consists of administrative managers, administrative clerks and students. Administrative practices involve three parties for processing and consuming the services. Administrative managers monitor the process of delivering good administrative practices in colleges; administrative clerks render administrative practices to students; and students consume the administrative practices in colleges. The population size in total is 793 and the sample size will be 375. Population of this study is divided into classes. Three TVET colleges have been selected for evaluation in KwaZulu-Natal therefore, 3 administrative managers will be part of the study since there is 1 administrative manager per college, 30 administrative clerks will be part of the study since there are 10 administrative clerks per college and 760 students will be part of the study.

Data will be collected via prepared SERVQUAL questionnaires from third year students because they have been on campus for a longer period and have better experience in exposure of services. The questionnaire will be designed to enhance the reliability and validity of the data.

The administration and distribution of the questionnaire and the systematic administration of the questionnaire is vital to ensure that the process is a smooth

transition for data collection. Each questionnaire will be numbered with a unique number to preserve anonymity.

This study will use the option of distributing questionnaires to respondents by hand delivery at the campuses during intervals in order to ensure that the target sample definitely receives and returns the questionnaires. Administrative clerks and students' assistance in distributing the questionnaires to the students will be used and after completion of the questionnaires, their assistance will be used to collect the questionnaires and hand them back to the researcher. In terms of triangulation of data, a follow-up interview will be conducted with administrative managers and clerks. These interviews will be voice recorded.

The questionnaires will be analysed using the latest version of the Statistical Package for Social Scientifics (SPSS). The analysis of the quantitative results will contain descriptive statistics including tables, graphs and statistical summaries. Qualitative data will be analysed using content analysis. In terms of the pilot testing of the questionnaire, for the purpose of this study 30 respondents will participate in campuses and will be randomly selected to test the questionnaire so that the necessary revisions can be made before administration to the research sample. The purpose of a pilot test is to refine the questions on the questionnaire in order to ensure that there is no ambiguity or bias so that the measuring instrument is fine-tuned for data collection. The validity and reliability of the pilot test will be conducted prior to the administration of questionnaire.

**Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:** N/A

**Benefits:** Direct benefit for Department of Higher Education & Training as well as the TVET Colleges both local and national. Publications in accredited peer reviewed journals. **Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:** There will be no adverse consequences for the participant should they choose to withdraw.

**Remuneration:** N/A, **Costs of the Study:** N/A **Confidentiality:** The gathered data will be treated as confidential and all respondents will remain anonymous.

**Research-related Injury:** N/A

**Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:** Please contact the researcher (073 6274 733 / 031 7710148), my supervisor (033) 845 8804/ 084 2068 767.) or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or [dvctip@dut.ac.za](mailto:dvctip@dut.ac.za).

**General:** Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population e.g. isiZulu.

**APPENDIX F: Consent Form**



**Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:**

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Nomzamo Monica Mpanza, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: **40/15,**
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name of Participant                      Date                      Time                      Signature                      /**  
**Right Thumbprint**

I, Nomzamo Monica Mpanza herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Nomzamo Monica Mpanza

\_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name of Researcher                      Date                      Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)    Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)    Date

Signature

***Please note the following:***

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level - use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting of a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counseling (Department of Health, 2004). If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumb print is required and an impartial witness, who is literate and knows the participant e.g. parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc. should verify in writing, duly signed that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004). If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. wrong date or spelling mistake a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant file and not thrown away and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

**References:** Department of Health: 2004. *Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes* <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/>

Department of Health. 2006. *South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Ed. Available at: [http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page\\_id=14](http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14)



## **APPENDIX G: Letter to Gatekeepers**



**To:** The College Principal (Rector)

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Nomzamo Monica Mpanza

**Qualification:** Masters in Commercial Administration.

**Student number:** 201517336

**Date:** 01/04/15

**Subject:** Permission to conduct research.

**Participants:** Students, Administrative Clerks and Administrative Manager

**Site:** Main campuses and Central offices of each college.

**Title of the Research Study:** Evaluation of Administrative Practices in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, namely: Elangeni TVET College, Coastal TVET College and EThekweni TVET College.

I, Nomzamo Monica Mpanza, would like to request permission to collect data from students' and staff at your college. This study will use the option of distributing questionnaires to respondents by hand delivery at the campuses during intervals in order to ensure that the target sample definitely receives and returns the questionnaires. Students' assistance in distributing the questionnaires to the students will be used and after completion of the questionnaires, their assistance will be used to collect the questionnaires and hand them back to the researcher. In terms of triangulation of data, a follow-up interview will be conducted with administrative managers and clerks. These interviews will be voice recorded.

The gathered data will be treated as confidential and all respondents will remain anonymous. I expect this research to be of direct benefit for Department of Higher Education & Training as well as the TVET Colleges both local and national. Presentations at TVET Colleges will make managers aware of the current status and proposed changes resulting in the improvement of Administrative Practice.

The findings of the study will be available at the (DUT) library as an online publication and a hard copy. I am currently employed by Elangeni TVET College as a Lecturer in Office Administration. Should you wish to contact me, my contact details: 073 6274 733 (C) / 031 7710 148 (W) / [phindilesious@gmail.com](mailto:phindilesious@gmail.com) / [/Mpanza@elangeni.edu.za](mailto:Mpanza@elangeni.edu.za). I will highly appreciate your support and co - operation.

Nomzamo Monica Mpanza                      01/04/15                      09:43    NM                      MPANZA

---

<b>Full Name of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Signature</b>
---------------------------------	-------------	-------------	------------------

## **APPENDIX H: Questionnaire for students' survey**



My name is Nomzamo Monica Mpanza. I am studying towards a Master's Degree in Commercial Administration, in the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics at the Durban University of Technology. I am required to submit a research report as a requirement for the study completion. My research involves the Evaluation of Administrative Practices in Three Selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. Participants of this study are National Vocational Certificate (Level 4) students since they have been at college for the longer period of time.

I would appreciate if you would assist me by completing the following voluntary Questionnaire. Please fill in the answer in the spaces provided by making a cross (X) on the space provided.

### **STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **SECTION A. PERSONAL DETAILS**

Please put a cross (X) in the appropriate box.

<b>1.1 Gender</b>		<b>1.2 Age</b>	
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 20 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	20 – less than 25 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	25 – less than 30 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 - < 40 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	40 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>1.3 Race</b>		<b>1.4 Course</b>	
African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Office Administration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coloured	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hospitality	<input type="checkbox"/>
White	<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Information Technology and Computer Science	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agricultural Science	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

**SECTION B**

Please circle the number appropriate to each factor item regarding administrative practice service expectations and actual service level you receive.

			How do you rate the Service level you EXPECT?					How do you rate the Service level you ACTUALLY RECEIVE?				
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Tangibles	1	The physical facilities are visually appealing administration venues	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	2	Administrative clerks are neat in appearance	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	3	Materials associated with Name (such as pamphlets, notes, guides) are visually appealing in the administration venues.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	4	Administrative clerks are always willing to assist, providing prompts service and never too busy to respond.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Reliability	5	When administrative clerks promise to do something by certain time, they do so.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	6	When students have a problem, Name will show a sincere interest in solving it	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	7	Administrative clerks perform the service right the first time (Attending to query, providing quotes, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	8	Administrative clerks provide the service at the time promised (meet deadlines)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Responsiveness	9	Administrative clerks always inform students exactly when the administrative services will be offered	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	10	Administrative clerks gives prompt service to students	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1

	11	All administrative clerks are always willing to help customers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	12	All administrative clerks are never too busy to respond to a student's request	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Assurance	13	The behaviour of administrative clerks instil confidence to students	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	14	Students feel safe in their enquires with administrative clerks	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	15	Administrative clerks are consistently courteous with students enquiries	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	16	Administrative clerks have knowledge to student's questions	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Empathy	17	Administrative clerks gives each student individual attention request.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	18	Administrative clerks have best interest at heart to help students.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	19	Administrative clerks gives each student personal attention	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	20	Administrative clerks understand the specific needs of each student.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
	21	Administrative service hours are convenient to students	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1

**SECTION C**

Are there any recommendations or suggestions on administrative practice being offered by the college to students?

Additional comments:

Thank you for your cooperation.

## **APPENDIX I: Questions for administrative clerks' interviews**



### **Interview Questions for Administrative Clerks**

1. Is the application system user friendly?
2. Are there any trainings/workshops for COLTECH software?
3. What are the time frames for capturing academic information?
4. How manageable is information captured on application system?
5. How Flexible is communication with students on campus?
6. How quick is the rectification of errors in information captured?
7. Is there any delay or non-rectification of captured information?
8. Is there any recommendations or improvements that you suggest about administrative practices being offered to student?
9. Is the application system always accessible?
10. Administrative managers are always supportive?

**Thank you for your cooperation.**



**Interview Questions for Administrative Managers**

1. Are there any challenges in academic capturing of information?
2. How accurate is the application system?
3. How quick is the rectification of errors on information captured?
4. Are the time frames fair for capturing academic information?
5. Are there any special arrangements for students who experience challenges in their academic information due to system error?
6. Is there any flexibility in communicating with DHET about the challenges of the application system?
7. Are any trainings/ workshops needed?
8. How accessible is the application system?
9. Are the administrative practices communicated well with students?
10. Is there any improvement that you can recommend to DHET about the application software being used to capture academic information for students?

**Thank you for your cooperation.**



**APPENDIX K: Language Editing Certificate**

Flat 1211 Cell: 0822673192

Kensington Email: garbharranhl@gmail.com

311 Peter Mokaba Road

Morningside

4001

01 June 2017

**EDITING CERTIFICATE**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

Dissertation title: **“Evaluation of Quality**

**Administrative Practices in Three Selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal”**

This is to certify that I have proofread and edited the dissertation of Nomzamo Monica Mpanza for accuracy of language and expression. After implementing changes, wherever applicable, I declare that this dissertation, to the best of my knowledge and ability, is grammatically correct and error-free.

**Dr H.L. Garbharran**

**B.A., Honours, M.P.A., D.P.A.**