SERVICE QUALITY AT DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, CENTRE FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP RAPID INCUBATOR

Abstract

The Business incubators have emerged as crucial mechanisms for fostering entrepreneurship and propelling global economic growth. These programmes provide aspiring entrepreneurs with essential resources, mentoring, and support services to facilitate the creation and launch of successful businesses. Consequently, business incubators have become essential components of government agencies, particularly those with a primary focus on entrepreneurship. The study aimed to assess the quality of service provided by the Durban University of Technology Centre for Social Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (DUT CSERI). The SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to assess the expectations and perceptions of SMMEs in relation to five quality dimensions. Non-probability sampling and convenience sampling were utilised to select 330 SMMEs affiliated with the DUT CSERI. Inferential and descriptive statistical analyses were utilised to assess the quality provided by the DUT CSERI. This study revealed that the DUT CSERI provides SMMEs with exceptional service quality. This is evidenced by the fact that SMME's perceptions of service quality exceeded their expectations. However, there is room for continuous improvement, as five out of twenty-two service quality gaps were successfully identified. It is recommended that DUT CSERI improve its tangibility and reliability service quality dimensions.

Keywords: Service, Service quality, Business incubation, Business development services, SMMEs

1. Introduction and background

Business incubators have emerged as crucial tools for fostering entrepreneurship and driving global economic development. These programmes provide vital tools, mentorship, and support services to aspiring entrepreneurs in order to enable the creation and launch of successful firms. As a result, business incubators have become essential components of educational institutions, especially those that place a significant focus on entrepreneurship. The purpose of this study is to investigate the service quality at DUT CSERI. The primary objectives include evaluating the quality of CSERI's services and identifying areas for improvement and strength in their service delivery. The results of this study will contribute to the current body of knowledge on service quality in business incubators and provide significant insights for improving CSERI's offerings.

1.1 Context of the research

The Centre for Social Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CSERI) is a rapid business incubator established at the Durban University of Technology to develop and support SMMEs in KwaZulu-Natal. CSERI offers comprehensive incubation programs, mentorship, networking opportunities, and business development services such as guidance on market research, business modeling, financial management, marketing strategies, and go-to-market planning. Over the last eight years, DUT CSERI has experienced remarkable success and growth as a rapid business incubator. It has established 187 SMMEs, created 423 jobs, supported 924 SMMEs, trained 5 268 youth, raised more than R13 million in funds for SMMEs, which generated nearly 400 million rands in turnover (CSERI 2023). While business incubators play an important role in the development of start-ups, fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing economic growth, questions have been raised about the quality of services given by such incubators (Torun *et al.* 2018). The effectiveness of such programmes is dependent on the quality of services provided, which has a substantial impact on the incubation process's outcomes (Sultana and Gupta 2020). Is therefore critical to evaluate the service quality provided by business incubators, with a focus on the South African setting. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the service quality at the DUT CSERI. It was envisaged that service quality gaps that would be identified would aid in improving CSERI service offerings, not only improving the sustainability of both the incubator and SMMEs. It was also envisaged that the adoption of recommendations that would emanate would enhance the overall service quality of other business incubators, thereby promoting the success of entrepreneurial initiatives in the South African entrepreneurial ecosystem.

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1.2 Problem statement, aim and objectives

As the business incubation sector grows and competition intensifies, it is critical to analyse and assess the quality of services provided by DUT CSERI. The growing number of business incubators, the high failure rate of start-up businesses, limited financial resources, COVID-19 challenges, and technological advancements have put significant pressure on business incubators to deliver superior service quality in order to remain relevant and effective (Hausberg and Korreck 2021). While, business incubators have attracted considerable attention in recent years as a tool for enhancing entrepreneurship and economic growth, there has been a dearth of research into service quality in the context of these programmes, particularly in the South African setting (Madlala 2018) and (Lose 2019). So the case with DUT CSERI where no empirical research has been undertaken to date to investigate the quality of services provided, and thus a need to identify service quality gaps with reference to the DUT CSERI. It is therefore critical to examine the degree of service quality at DUT CSERI to identify any shortcomings and adapt their value proposition to fit in with developing entrepreneurial ecosystem paradigms through incubatee feedback. The aim of this research study is to assess the service quality of DUT CSERI. The objective of the study was to determine SMMEs' expectations and perceptions of service quality and identify gaps in service quality at DUT CSERI.

2. Literature review

2.1 South Africa government policy initiatives

Governments worldwide have implemented policies and incentives to promote the growth and sustainability of small businesses (SMMEs), aiming to provide an optimal environment for entrepreneurial activity, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and streamline the process of starting and running a business (Yu 2017; Abrahams 2018; Ouma-Mugabe, Chan and Marais 2021). However, tax policies and selective subsidies can impact market concentration and eliminate efficient businesses (Chandra, Paul and Chavan 2020). Government assistance programs must be context-specific and evidence-based to improve the performance of small businesses without negatively impacting other market participants (Neumeyer, Santos and Morris 2019).

South Africa has implemented various policies and programs to promote SMMEs, aiming to stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and alleviate poverty. The Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) was established in 2004 to provide non-financial assistance(Hewitt and Van Rensburg 2020; Botha *et al.* 2021), while organizations like the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) (Ndayizigamiye and Khoase 2018), Micro-Agricultural Financial Institution of South Africa, Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA), and Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) were established in 2014 to facilitate small business lending (Mnguni 2018; Tala 2021).

This study investigates the service quality at DUT CSERI, focusing on government initiatives and challenges faced by SMEs. Understanding the quality of services provided by business incubators is crucial for addressing high SMME failure rates and enhancing the support system (Pakurár *et al.* 2019; Akpoviroro, Oba-Adenuga and Akanmu 2021; A'Aqoulah, Kuyini and Albalas 2022). Service quality at DUT CSERI will be evaluated based on aspects such as responsiveness, reliability, tangibility, assurance, and empathy. This evaluation will help identify areas for improvement and inform policy decisions to improve the support ecosystem for SMEs.

2.2 Business incubation in South Africa

South Africans are hopeful about beginning their own enterprises and believe they have the requisite skills and experience (Chandra, Paul and Chavan 2020). Nonetheless, hurdles remain in the development of an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem (Neumeyer, Santos and Morris 2019). According to Chandra, Paul and Chavan (2020), the survival rate of SMMEs in South Africa remains low. Business incubators (BIs) in South Africa play a crucial role in facilitating the development and growth of businesses, fostering economic growth, and creating job opportunities (Sanyal and Hisam 2018; Zouari and Abdelhedi 2021; A'Aqoulah, Kuyini and Albalas 2022). BIs primary responsibilities include promoting start-up developments and contributing to economic growth through comprehensive business development services by providing a variety of services and resources to nurture and accelerate the growth of entrepreneurial initiatives, such as mentoring, networking opportunities, access to funding, marketing support, and company planning aid (Shehada *et al.* 2020; Zariman, Humaidi and Abd Rashid 2022) as well as shared resources, market access, research and development facilities (Lamine *et al.* 2018; Torun *et al.* 2018; Le Tellier *et al.* 2019; Roundy 2021). These benefits allow SMMEs to build their businesses successfully,

save money, and expand their market reach (Xiao and North 2018; Lukeš, Longo and Zouhar 2019; Sansone *et al.* 2020). Understanding the distinctive features and dynamics of the country's BIs can help policymakers and stakeholders successfully harness their full potential for stimulating entrepreneurship, driving economic development, and attaining desired goals (Zariman, Humaidi and Abd Rashid 2022).

2.2.1   Definition of business incubator

A business incubator (BI) is a program designed to accelerate the successful development of startups through an array of business support resources and services, developed and orchestrated by incubator management (Shehada *et al.* 2020). The primary goal of a BI is to help entrepreneurs overcome common barriers to success, such as access to cash, networks, and business skills (Lose 2016; Sanyal and Hisam 2018; Xiao and North 2018; Hewitt and Van Rensburg 2020). BIs have evolved over time to reflect the changing demands and dynamics of entrepreneurs, with some focusing on social entrepreneurship or industries like biotechnology, financial technology, or renewable energy (Lose 2016; Sanyal and Hisam 2018). The effectiveness of BIs can vary depending on factors such as the quality of their support services, the selection and screening process for participating ventures, and the alignment between the incubator's offerings and the needs of the startups (Alpenidze, Pauceanu and Sanyal 2019). Continuous review and customization of incubator programs are critical to ensure their relevance and impact (Godeiro *et al.* 2018).

2.2.2   Types of business incubators

A number of factors influence the classification of BIs, including their growth stage, service offerings, and industry focus (Lukeš, Longo and Zouhar 2019). The main types of BIs include technology incubators (Xiao and North 2018), social incubators (Sansone *et al.* 2020), corporate incubators (Kötting 2020), government incubators (Lamine *et al.* 2018), mixed-use incubators (Le Tellier *et al.* 2019), regional incubators (Roundy 2021), and academic incubators (Lose 2019). These institutions demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in serving the specific demands of various sectors and regions, supporting the establishment and growth of entrepreneurial attempts in a variety of sectors by adapting their services to the specific needs of entrepreneurs.

2.2.3   Rapid incubators

Rapid Incubators, also known as accelerated or virtual incubators, are business incubators that support the creation and development of businesses through a faster and more flexible process (Zhang, Jun and Palacios 2021). They leverage technology and online platforms to connect entrepreneurs with resources and support in a shorter timeframe, aiming to help start-ups reach key milestones and achieve success in a shorter period of time (Lamine *et al.* 2018; Surana, Singh and Sagar 2020). Rapid incubators provide access to a wide range of resources and services, including mentorship, funding, and training, helping start-ups reach key milestones and achieve success in a shorter period of time (Baldassarre *et al.* 2017; Zun, Ibrahim and Hamid 2018; Guillén Perales *et al.* 2020; Ghosh, Mehta and Avittathur 2021; Zutshi *et al.* 2021).

2.2.4   Key success factors for business incubators

Key success factors for business incubation include location and facilities, governance, business development services (BDS), networking opportunities, BI culture, incubatee quality, and financial resources (Torun *et al.* 2018; Alpenidze, Pauceanu and Sanyal 2019; Akpoviroro, Oba-Adenuga and Akanmu 2021). These factors are interconnected and can impact the success of an incubator (Lose 2019; Chandra, Paul and Chavan 2020; Kötting 2020; Aziz and Alluhaidan 2022). The success of a business incubator depends on its location and the aesthetic value of its facilities (Lose 2019), as well as its governance and leadership style (Aziz, Asgarnezhad and Mahmood 2021). A well-managed and governed incubator will have satisfied staff who treat SMMEs properly, making the BI sustainable (Chandra, Paul and Chavan 2020). An incubator's management should foster an organizational culture that values and respects diversity, allowing employees and clients to freely contribute to the BI's long-term viability (Harper-Anderson and Lewis 2018; Borishade *et al.* 2021; Cao and Zhang 2022).

2.2.5   Challenges faced by business incubators

BIs face numerous challenges such as financial sustainability, limited personnel, equipment, and infrastructure, difficulty in selecting appropriate incubatees, measurement of performance, networking opportunities, adaptability to changing market conditions, lack of diversity among SMMEs, availability of funding, scaling and growth support, and engagement with external parties (Sanyal and Hisam 2018; Lose 2019; Akpoviroro, Oba-Adenuga and Akanmu 2021; Rens *et al.* 2021; Yasin, Khansari and Tirmizi 2021; Paoloni and Modaffari 2022).

2.2.6   The SERVQUAL Model

SERVQUAL is a model for measuring service quality developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985 and is based on the gap model of service quality which measures service quality across five dimensions: tangibles,

dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Carey *et al.* 2019; Vojtek and Smudja 2019; Andrade, Moazeni and Ramirez-Marquez 2020; Ziyad *et al.* 2020). These dimensions can affect customer satisfaction (Adebiyi, Akinrinmade and Amole 2022; Singh and Garg 2022; Zhang *et al.* 2022). SERVQUAL has been widely adopted to measure service quality in various contexts, including business incubators (Kassim, Bogari and Zain 2015; Golshan *et al.* 2019; Yong-Sik and Yung Kyun 2019; Sultana and Gupta 2020; Zhang *et al.* 2022). SERVQUAL model faced criticisms for its reliance on customer expectations and lack of consideration of social and emotional aspects of service encounters (Chihwai 2019; Letsoalo and Mpwanya 2019; Ledwaba 2020). The SERVPERF scale, which focuses on customers' perceptions of service quality rather than their expectations, was developed by Cronin and Taylor in 1992 and was used as an alternative measurement approach (Konerding *et al.* 2019; Amoah *et al.* 2022). Despite these criticisms, academics and practitioners concur that SERVQUAL and SERVPERV are the most applicable frameworks for measuring service quality across various industries and disciplines (Letsoalo and Mpwanya 2019; Mpanza *et al.* 2019). In the context of business incubators, SERVQUAL was chosen as it helps to identify service quality gaps between what SMMEs expect to receive and what they actually receive (Mufudza and Naidoo 2018; Zeithaml 2018; Naudé, Henrico and Staden 2022).

3. Methodology

A quantitative survey was conducted to collect information from owners of SMMEs that were serviced by CSERI. According to Nardi (2018) for a population of 924 the sample size was calculated to be 272 SMMEs, using 95% confidence level and 5% error of margin. Based on a response rate of 80%, 340 SERVQUAL questionnaires were administered to meet the required sample size. The researcher employed non-probability sampling to collect data, as it was simpler and more cost-effective in terms of time and money (Basias and Pollalis 2018). Convenience sampling is based on factors that are convenient for the researcher, such as respondents who are readily accessible, geographically close, have known contacts, or are interested in taking part in the study (Govender 2017; Zouari and Abdelhedi 2021). The SERVQUAL questionnaire consisted of six demographic questions, twenty-two questions on expectations, and twenty-two questions on SMMEs' perceptions, using a five-point Likert scale (Joshi *et al.* 2015; Mbise and Tuninga 2016; Zeithaml 2018; Taherdoost 2019). The survey was distributed using Survey Monkey, a cloud-based tool for survey creation and analysis. The SPSS statistical package (version 29) for statistical tests was used for descriptive and inferential analysis study (Godeiro *et al.* 2018).

The Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the level of homogeneity of the questionnaire's factors and factor analysis was used to minimize sets of data (Bandalos and Finney 2018; Kost and da Rosa 2018; Watkins 2018; Sileyew 2019). Validity was ensured through a pilot test and consultation with practitioners and statisticians (McConachie *et al.* 2018; Ndlovu 2018; Patil *et al.* 2019). Reliability was ensured by harnessing Cronbach's alpha, as it is centered on the consistency of the research study's measures (Mbise and Tuninga 2016; Mosimanegape *et al.* 2020). The researcher pre-tested the instruments used to collect data to ensure clarity and precision.

4. Results and discussions

The researcher distributed 340 questionnaires, and 330 out of 340 were returned, resulting in a 97% response rate. The table1 below summarises the response rate of the CSERI survey responses.

Table. 1: Response rate from DUT CSERI

Name of the Business Incubator	Total population	Planned sample size as per power analysis	Estimated response rate	Actual number of questionnaires distributed	Actual response rate	Achieved sample size
DUT CSERI	924	272	80%	340	97%	330

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The demographic data of the respondents consisted of quantifiable statistical information about the participants such as education, gender, race, and marital status. The majority of respondents (330) are business owners, with 98% being business owners. According to the distribution of respondents' business sectors, manufacturing, wholesale and retail, telecommunications, finance, and transport accounted for 72%. Gender distribution was 53% male and 47% female, indicating a substantial proportion of gender equality in SMME ownership (Yu 2017; Olubiyi *et al.* 2022). The distribution of respondents based on the number of employees clearly shows that 97% met the criteria of being an SMME as defined by the Small Business Development Act of 2006 (Bvuma and Marnewick 2020; Sidek *et al.* 2020; Botha *et al.* 2021). The majority of responding SMMEs (85%) have been in operation for less than ten years, suggesting that SMMEs less than ten years old require incubator services. According to the data, 95% of the entrepreneurs has some form of education w which highlights the importance of literacy among South African entrepreneurs.

4.2   Inferential statistics

The responses from the participants were statistically analysed, discussed, tabulated and presented in graphs and tables. It was essential to observe that the survey respondents were a good representation of the entire population. Cronbach's alpha value of 0.97 confirmed the reliability of the summative rating (Likert scale) comprised of the specified variables, indicating that both the instrument and the results were genuine. Responses regarding expectations and perceptions of service quality were tabulated and juxtaposed to identify service quality dimensions gaps as presented in figure.1 to figure 5 below. The figures clearly show the SMMEs' expectations and perceptions of each variable that makes up a dimension a service quality.

Figure.1 below shows the SMMEs' expectations and perceptions of each variable that makes up the tangibility dimension of service quality.

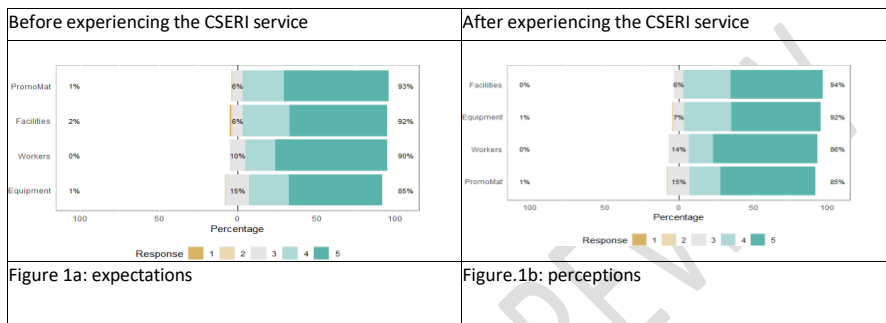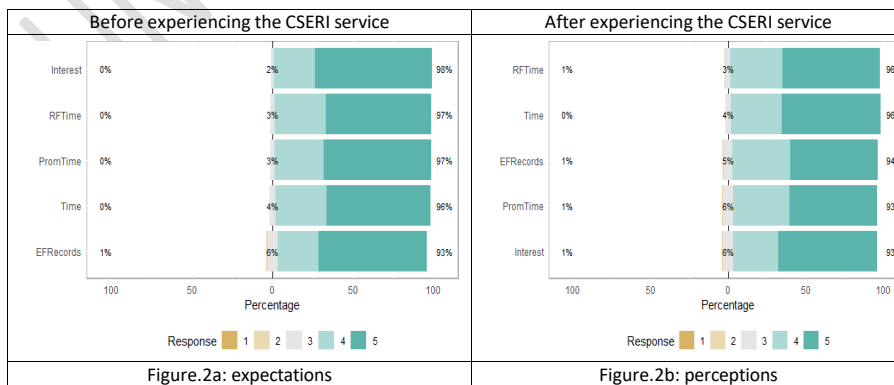| Before experiencing the CSERI service	After experiencing the CSERI service
Figure 1a: expectations	Figure.1b: perceptions

Figure 1: Tangibility - Linked-scale graph

Figure.1 illustrates that prior to SMMEs experiencing CSERI service quality, all variables were scored highly and deemed significant. The most crucial factor under tangibles, was determined to be visually appealing promotional materials, followed by visually appealing facilities, formally dressed employees, and finally modern-looking equipment. However, the order of importance shifted after SMMEs experienced the grade of service provided by CSERI. The CSERI was regarded as having visually appealing facilities that exceeded the SMMEs' expectations. This also applies to modern-looking equipment, which was expected to be rated last at 85% but moved to second place with a score of 92%. The variables on performance of professionally dressed employees and visually appealing promotional materials did not meet the expectations of SMMEs. CSERI should enhance employees' attire and promotional materials so that they appear professional and visually appealing. The current values of these two variables are 85% and 86%, which is very acceptable, but there is room for improvement. The results of the t-value, p-value, mean difference, and confidence interval on the tangibility dimensions all indicate that the results were not the result of random chance. They are sufficient for generalisation by all other incubators.

Figure 2 below shows the SMMEs' expectations and perceptions of each variable that make up the reliability dimension of service quality.

Before experiencing the CSERI service	After experiencing the CSERI service
Figure.2a: expectations	Figure.2b: perceptions

Figure. 2: Reliability-linked-scale graph

As depicted in Figure .2, the expected scores for the variables under the reliability dimension are extremely high, indicating that SMMEs anticipated CSERI to be precise when it comes to these variables. The literature confirms that dependability is the most essential aspect of service quality (Sohail and Hasan 2021). The SMMEs expected CSERI to demonstrate a genuine interest in resolving their issues with a score of 98%, followed by performing the service correctly the first time (97%), and finally by delivering the service at the promised time (97%). After experiencing the CSERI services, SMMEs deemed the importance of performing the service correctly the first time to be 96%. Even though the difference is only one percent, this reveals the improvement area. Other areas for development include demonstrating a genuine interest in resolving SMMEs' problems and delivering services at the promised time. The two variables are 4% lower. Insistence on error-free documents was the only variable that had a positive variance. The variable increased by 1%. These results indicate that the service quality in this dimension falls short of the expectations of SMMEs. This shows the service quality gap that requires urgent attention. The results of the t-value, p-value, mean difference, and confidence interval on the reliability dimensions all indicate that the results were not the result of random chance. They are sufficient for generalisation by all other incubators.

Figure.3 below shows the SMMEs' expectations and perceptions of each variable that make up the responsiveness dimension of service quality.

Before experiencing the CSERI service	After experiencing the CSERI service
Figure .3a: expectations	Figure .3b: perceptions
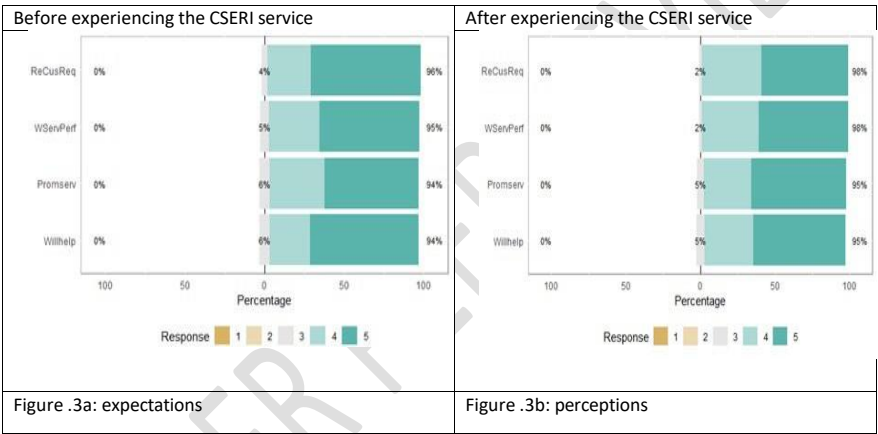
Figure. 3: Responsiveness-linked-scale graph

The classification of variables within the responsiveness dimension by SMMEs was identical before and after experiencing the service, as depicted in Figure.3. The perceptions of these variables by SMMEs were significantly more positive after experiencing the service. This indicates that CSERI's service quality exceeds the SMMEs' expectations for responsiveness. The results of the t-value, p-value, mean difference, and confidence interval on the responsiveness dimensions all indicate that the results were not the result of random chance. They are sufficient for generalisation by all other incubators.

Figure.4 displays the expectations and perceptions of SMMEs regarding each variable comprising the assurance dimension of service quality.

Before experiencing the CSERI service	After experiencing the CSERI service

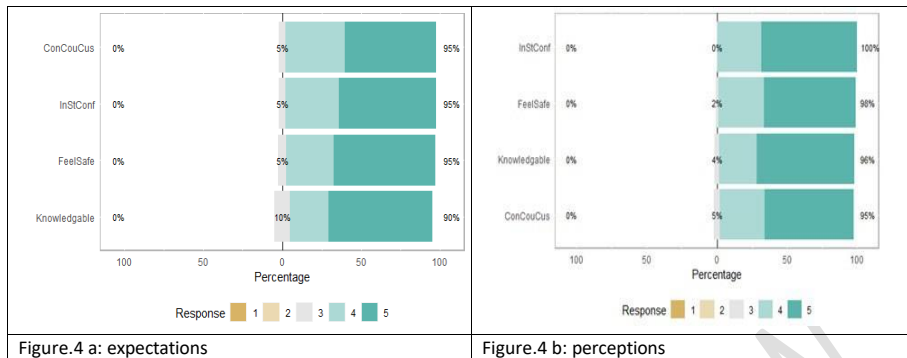| Figure.4 a: expectations | Figure.4 b: perceptions |

Figure . 4: Assurance linked-scale graph

As depicted in Figure.4, SMME expectations were 95% on three variables, excluding employees' ability to answer queries with knowledge. The CSERI service quality exceeded the SMMEs' expectations, with customer confidence offering the greatest achievements. Even though CSERI employees were consistently courteous to SMMEs, they still have room for improvement. The perception was equivalent to anticipation. The results of the t-value, p-value, mean difference, and confidence interval on the assurance dimensions all indicate that the results were not the result of random chance. They are sufficient for generalisation by all other incubators.

The expectations of SMMEs for each variable comprising the empathy dimension of service quality are depicted in Figure .5. The average expected score for all variables was 95%, except for personalised attention to SMMEs (93%).

| Before experiencing the CSERI service | After experiencing the CSERI service |
| Figure .5 a: expectations | Figure .5 b: perceptions |
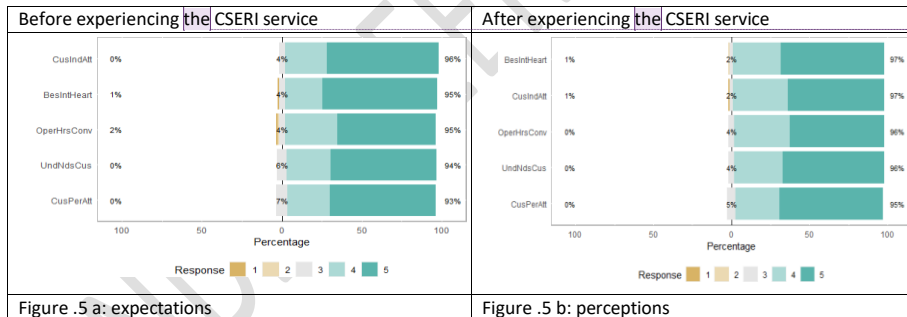
Figure. 5: Empathy linked-scale graph

As shown in Figure.5, the CSERI service quality exceeded what the SMMEs anticipated. The variable's position within this dimension remains unchanged. There is still space for improvement, as the maximum score is 100. The results of the t-value, p-value, mean difference, and confidence interval on the empathy dimensions all indicate that the results were not the result of random chance. They are sufficient for generalisation by all other incubators.

The summarised scores for each variable are tabulated in figure.6 below. The figure clearly shows the 22 variables that were considered for the measurements of expectations and perceptions. The data review that 5 variables out of 22 require improvements and 17 variables shows that CSERI service quality is exceptionally doing well. However, variables with a score less than a 100% on perceptions also indicates that there is room for improvement.

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Scores for each question on SERVQUAL
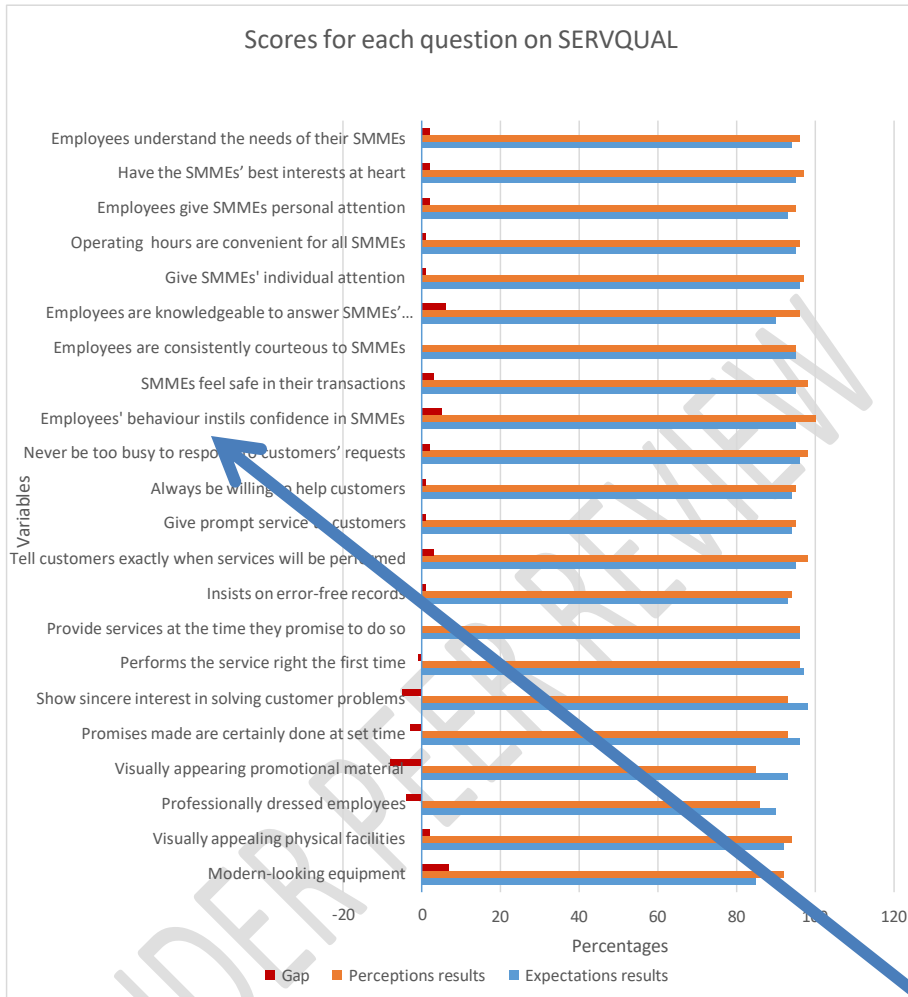
Figure .6: Expectations and perceptions scores

The t-test was used to determine the level of significance and it indicated that the results were due to an arbitrary occurrence and could be implemented in other incubators. Cohen's d and Hedges' corrections were also used to corroborate the t-test, and all of the results confirmed the validity, dependability, and significance of the collected data and used methodologies. The principal component analysis (PCA) was also performed to determine the service quality's determinants. Only three components with variances greater than one were identified. The first component contributes about 28.5%, the second component contributes about 26.6%, and the third component contributes approximately 10.6%. This statistical analysis revealed the service quality dimensions that had the greatest influence on determining service quality. These factors included tangibility, reliability and assurance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used to determine whether the PCA model was the best model for analyzing the data. The KMO value ranged from 0 to 1, with a 0.9 value indicating that the PCA model was the most suitable for the data.

The results showed that the CSERI service quality exceeded expectations, but there is still room for improvement. Reliability was identified as the most important dimension among all service dimensions. Whilst responsiveness, assurance, and empathy service dimensions contributed to the variation in the data. These dimensions are crucial

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for enhancing service quality. The study also found that modern-looking equipment and visually appealing physical facilities significantly influenced SMMEs' perceptions of service quality. The study also found that employees' behavior instilled confidence in SMMEs, making them feel safe in their transactions. CSERI must train employees to understand the needs of SMMEs and provide them with necessary business development services.

5. Summary

This study aimed to assess the service quality at the CSERI, a business incubator in Durban, South Africa, by identifying service quality gaps. The research findings were aimed to improve SMME retention, acquisition of the best SMMEs, and service to these SMMEs. The government's role in the development of SMMEs, policies, and establishment of business incubators in South Africa were discussed, along with the history of CSERI and its alignment with government policies. The study examined service quality dimensions and the significance of business incubators in maintaining high standards of service quality. The service quality gap model was used to examine the causes of service quality disparities and revealed that closing the gap between SMMEs' expectations and their perceptions of service quality was crucial. The results revealed the service quality aspects that CSERI excels at, the areas for improvement, and the areas that must be maintained as they are. Superior service quality will ultimately result in customer satisfaction and repeat business. The findings also reviewed that the order of importance for variables comprising a dimension does not remain the same for SMMEs due to numerous other factors.

6. Recommendation

The findings identified gaps in service quality and contributed to existing knowledge on service quality in business incubators. Recommendations for enhancing CSERI's services include regular service quality measurement, involving every employee, improving promotional materials, introducing an employee dress code, maintaining current standards, and fostering reliability among employees. The study also recommended that management and staff should emphasize the importance of reliability in service quality, ensuring that promises are fulfilled within set time and employees show interest in solving problems. Regularly gathering and assessing the views, requirements, and preferences of SMMEs will help both leadership and employees address problems before they become severe. Employees should be trained and equipped to resolve identified challenges faced by SMMEs.

It is also recommended that future studies should be conducted using SERVQUAL to assess service quality of CSERI, whilst incorporating employees' views, as they are an essential component in creating, delivery, and consumption of services. Additionally, researchers should also ask SMMEs to complete the expectations questionnaire before joining the incubator and at regular intervals to complete the perceptions questionnaire to understand their expectations and identify development patterns or anomalies before they become unmanageable. Multiple case studies should also be considered instead of being limited to a single case study in this case the CSERI at Durban University of Technology. A representative sample size of entrepreneurs affiliated with multiple business incubators should be selected and a reliable data capturing method from entrepreneurs should be devised. This will ensure that findings may be generalizable to other business incubators or social entrepreneurship ecosystems in South Africa or other countries, and the study relied on.

7. Conclusion
The rapid increase of business incubators in South Africa necessitated the measurement of service quality in order to develop sustainable SMMEs that provide solutions to unemployment, social ills, and improving livelihoods. Business incubators should provide exceptional quality services to SMMEs to remain competitively sustainable and create lasting economic impacts.

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