



St. Mary's University
School of Graduate Studies
MBA Program

**MEASURING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION LEVEL
ON ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES SERVICE:
THE CASE OF NORTHERN ETHIOPIA HISTORIC
ROUTE FLIGHTS**

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Addis Ababa,



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*A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of St. Mary's University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Business Administration*

**ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
FACULTY OF BUSINESS**

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Yonas Mamo**

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DEDICATION PAGE

This research work is dedicated for:

All my families

My wife Manalebsh Aklilu

My two little angels Tensea & Esete Yonas

My Mom Wro Birke Haile

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*“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
Psalm 37:34. Thank you God!!!*

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List of abbreviations

CEO- Chief Executive Officer

Cust - Svcs- Customer services

ET-Ethiopian Airlines

ETB - Ethiopian Birr

Pax –Passenger

Q-400 – Aircraft Type

SPSS –Statistical Package for Social Sciences

TWA – Trans World Airlines

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the level of customer satisfaction on the air transport service provided by Ethiopian airlines. The study used a descriptive survey design to obtain information on the level of perceived service quality from passengers of Ethiopian airlines in the historic routes. This historic route composed of flight from Addis Ababa via Gonder, Lalibela and Axsum. The study mainly adopted a case study approach and the respondents constituted Passengers who had used Ethiopian airlines to fly to the historic destinations of Ethiopia. The research was conducted on a cross sectional bases and lasts for one week on December 15- 21, 2013. The sample of this study consisted of one hundred nine (109) passengers. Only primary data source was used to answer the research questions. This data was mainly obtained through administering of questionnaires. This questionnaire had four basic sections grouped under airport services, onboard products and In-flight services. The data collected was analyzed by use of the frequency, percentage and correlation Analysis. The study findings indicate that among the variables tested under arrival staff assistance, check in staff attitude, check in waiting time and check in efficiency created dissatisfaction on passengers. On the other hand a significant satisfaction response was found from passengers on punctuality, flight cancelation, onboard products and in-flight staffs' hospitability. This study contributes to existing theories of service quality and level of customer satisfaction by confirming or adding value to the relationships that are involved in customer satisfaction and service quality at Ethiopian airlines. It provides results that are useful to Ethiopian airlines to consider both ways of increasing customer satisfaction through acquiring of new aircrafts and proper management of operational as well as back office employees.

Key words: Airport services, onboard products, in-flight service, historic route, customer satisfaction and Ethiopian Airlines.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Ethiopian is, first and foremost, a customer focused and market driven airline. In a context of hyper competitive global airline industry, the only way for Ethiopian to sustain its success is through its differentiated service delivery and by meeting its customers' expectations..."

Tewolde Gebremariam CEO of Ethiopian Airlines, 2013

Though the wishes of airlines owners and executive managers are to satisfy or go beyond and delight their customers' expectation but the reality is different. For the reason described by Tolpa (2012) as Airline industry has always been famous for its continuous struggle: cutting costs, increasing oil price, managing fluctuating demand, keeping up with tight quality requirements while trying to maintain superior services and satisfy needs of various customer groups.

For this reason and other unforeseen circumstances Airlines fail to meet their customers need, the Economist (2013) described this reality with "Americans dislike their airline" and this fact is supported by the country's customer satisfaction index in 2013, the country's airline industry received, as a whole, a score of 69 on a 100-point scale. That's lower than energy utilities (77), hospitals (78), banks (77) and the soft-drinks industry (84).

1.1 Background of the Study

The first Ethiopian Airlines scheduled flight took place to Cairo via Asmara in Douglas C-47 Skytrain. The national airline had been set up a few months earlier as Ethiopian Air Lines Inc., a joint venture with American airline, TWA (Trans World Airlines). Five US Government surplus C-47 aircraft were purchased for venture. Following the successful inaugural flight to Cairo, a regular weekly service was established. Weekly services to Djibouti and Aden followed, as well as a domestic service to Jimma. Demands for additional services were so great that towards the end of 1946 (Ethiopian Airlines, 1988).

Ethiopian Airlines (Ethiopian) is the fastest growing Airline in Africa. In its operations in the past close to seven decades, Ethiopian has become one of the continent's leading carriers, unrivalled in efficiency and operational success (Ethiopian, 2012)

Ethiopian commands the lion's share of the pan-African passenger and cargo network operating the youngest and most modern fleet to more than 76 international destinations across five continents. Ethiopian fleet includes ultra-modern and environmentally friendly aircraft such as the Boeing 787, Boeing 777-200LR, Boeing 777-200LR Freighter and Bombardier Q-400 with double cabin. In fact, Ethiopian is the first airline in Africa to own and operate these aircraft (Ethiopian, 2013).

Ethiopian is currently implementing a 15-year strategic plan called Vision 2025 that will see it become the leading aviation group in Africa with seven business centers: Ethiopian Domestic and Regional Airline; Ethiopian International Passenger Airline; Ethiopian Cargo; Ethiopian MRO; Ethiopian Aviation Academy; Ethiopian In-flight Catering Services; and Ethiopian Ground Service. Ethiopian is a multi-award winning airline registering an average growth of 25% in the past seven years (Ethiopian, 2010).

Ethiopian has 75 international and 17 domestic stations on these stations there are on average two to three flights per week with a round trip. These domestic stations covered with three fleet types that are composed of B757, 737 and Q-400 aircrafts with a capacity of 200, 120 and 78 peoples caring capacity respectively. By doing so Ethiopian airlines has received a lot of awards from different organization for its services quality, some of them are customer service awards.

1. In 2012, Ethiopian has received Gold for its customer service by the African Aviation News Portal for having collected the highest number of votes, ahead of other airlines, in a survey involving 20,000 travelers.
2. Ethiopian Airlines SKYTRAX Star Rating 2013 award winner which gives the airline a 3-stra airline rating of product and service quality (Skytrax, 2013).

Ethiopian designed a domestic route which connects the tourist attracting sites that are found to the northern part of the country and name it Historic route. This Historic route

connects the cities of Addis Ababa, Gonder, Lalibela and Axsum. There is a daily flight to this route with a Q-400 Next generation aircrafts carrying capacity of 78 Passengers.

Beyond its mission of making the airline competitive, customer focused and profitable it has an equal target of enhancing the tourism industry development of the country by connecting the world to these tourist destinations of Ethiopia. To make this dream a reality the airline has a scheduled daily flight to the historic route.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

“Ethiopian Airlines plays a critical and major role in bringing the cities of the different regions of Ethiopia within easy reach of Addis Ababa, the capital. This effort will be further enhanced with the introduction of Q400 Next Gen aircraft.” He further stated about the particular attention given to develop the domestic service, advising the establishment of a department in charge of the domestic operations.

Girma Wake CEO of Ethiopian March 21, 2010.

Ethiopian airlines changed its domestic fleets from Fokker 50 aircrafts with maximum carrying capacity of 50 passengers to state of the art Q-400 Next Gen aircraft that has 78 seats capacity since December 31, 2010 with the aim of improving customer service (Ethiopian, 2010).

By doing the above Ethiopian claimed it improved its customer service, did the same perceived by passengers of this historic route?

In the contrary Ethiopian is accused for poor customer service. Even customers mostly complain in different mass medias for sub-standardized service of the airline /treatments they experienced with domestic service given by the airline in general and the historic route in particular (the Reporter,2013).

Therefore this study measured the level of customer satisfaction over air transport service provided by the airline on historic route flight especially on the aircraft change made by the airline and parts of the services which brought the dissatisfaction from the customer point of view.

1.3 Research Questions

This research answered the following basic questions in relation to historic route service quality of Ethiopian airlines

1. Does the service quality change made by Ethiopian airlines to meet customers' expectations on historic route flight perceived by customers?
2. Are Ethiopian airlines customers satisfied with the service given by front line and in-flight staffs'?
3. Are Customers satisfied with the in-flight services provided by Ethiopian airlines?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 General objective

The general objective of this research was to measure the historic route flight service quality of Ethiopian airlines from the customers' point of view, identify the service types which did not meet customers' expectations and finally to draw possible recommendations to improve the service quality.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

Customer satisfaction measurement is a basic service improvement mechanism for customer service provider enterprises like Ethiopian airlines. Accordingly this study assessed level of customer satisfaction on the following key service areas of the airline.

- To determine level of customer satisfaction over airport based services of Ethiopian airlines like baggage service, check in service, boarding efficiency and staff efficiency on the services.
- To rate level of customer satisfaction over onboard products of the airline like aircraft seat, cabin cleanliness and other cabin services
- To measure level of customer satisfaction over the service provided by cabin staffs of the airline
- To measure the perception of passengers on over all service quality provided by Ethiopian.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Customer satisfaction: - The extent to which a product/a service perceived performance matches a buyer's expectation.

Historic route: - scheduled/ unscheduled flight route connecting the three tourist destinations namely starting from Addis Ababa to Gonder, Lalibela and Axsum.

Service quality:- Parasumaran et al. (1985) state that service quality is defined by the customer evaluation of service outcome and service process as well as a comparison of customer expectations with service performance.

1.6 Organization of the Paper

This research paper is organized in to five main chapters. The first chapter deals with introductory issues of the paper which were classified in to introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, significance of the study.

The second chapter was composed of literature reviews organized in two major groups. First conceptual literatures collected and organized on ideas, theories and concepts from books, journals and other electronic sources. Second empirical literatures organized from papers released empirical evidences done on similar fields and business categories.

The third chapter focused on research methods and design on how the data sources determined, selected, analyzed and presented using different techniques.

Chapter four is dealing with analysis of data collected using descriptive statistical techniques and other statistical methods.

The fifth chapter composed of three major parts namely summaries of findings, conclusion and recommendations drawn from the study.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The results of this research could help to show the gaps between the historic route service quality provided by Ethiopian airlines and the level of satisfaction perceived by the

customers. Accordingly, the airline will use the gaps identified as an input for its customer service improvement strategy and a baseline to other researchers to further identify other gaps from the airline perspective. Therefore, improvement of gaps identified could help the airline to attain its vision and mission since one of the airlines mission and vision is to become a customer centered and airline of choice to its customers by 2025 (Ethiopian Airlines, 2010).

As World Bank (2012) describes, these days Ethiopian road transport service is improved significantly so that customers may shift to use road transportation service than the air transport. Therefore this research will help the airline to improve its customer service and become a choice of transport means to its customers in the competitive market.

As it is depicted by Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia Ethiopian economy is growing on average by 11.4% the last five years (CSA, 2013). Shutkina (2009), states that economic growth has a direct relationship with preference of transportation means. Therefore this study will help the airline to improve its customer service and tap this market potential properly.

1.8 Delimitation/Scope of the Study

Even though, Ethiopian airlines is providing international and domestic passenger, cargo, maintenance, aviation training and other aviation related services (Ethiopian Airlines, 2010), this research was focused only on the domestic flight specifically historic route customer service of the airline from the perspective of its passengers/customers perception of the service.

A major problems or limitations faced during the research period were:

1. Lack of voluntariness from the passenger's side to fill the questionnaires at Addis Ababa Bole International airport site.
2. Almost all of the passengers did not use website of the airline for online ticketing instead they physical checked ticket offices of the airline and other travel agencies. Accordingly they did not able to comment on the website service of the airline

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter different conceptual and empirical literature reviewed in relation to the research topic, accordingly the reviewed literatures are presented as follows.

2.1 Theories of customer service

2.1.1 Assimilation Theory

Assimilation theory is based on Festinger's (1962) dissonance theory. Dissonance theory posits that consumers make some kind of cognitive comparison between expectations about the product and the perceived product performance. This view of the consumer post-usage evaluation was introduced into the satisfaction literature in the form of assimilation theory. According to Anderson (1973), consumers seek to avoid dissonance by adjusting perceptions about a given product to bring it more in line with expectations. Consumers can also reduce the tension resulting from a discrepancy between expectations and product performance either by distorting expectations so that they coincide with perceived product performance or by raising the level of satisfaction by minimizing the relative importance of the disconfirmation experienced.

2.1.2 Contrast Theory

Contrast theory was first introduced by Hovland, Harvey and Sherif (1987). Dawes et al (1972) define contrast theory as the tendency to magnify the discrepancy between one's own attitudes and the attitudes represented by opinion statements. Contrast theory presents an alternative view of the consumer post-usage evaluation process than was presented in assimilation theory in that post-usage evaluations lead to results in opposite predictions for the effects of expectations on satisfaction. While assimilation theory posits that consumers will seek to minimize the discrepancy between expectation and performance, contrast theory holds that a surprise effect occurs leading to the discrepancy being magnified or exaggerated.

According to the contrast theory, any discrepancy of experience from expectations will be exaggerated in the direction of discrepancy. If the firm raises expectations in his advertising, and then a customer's experience is only slightly less than that promised, the product/service would be rejected as totally un-satisfactory. Conversely, under-promising in advertising and over-delivering will cause positive disconfirmation also to be exaggerated.

2.1.3 Assimilation-Contrast Theory

Assimilation-contrast theory suggests that if performance is within a customer's latitude (range) of acceptance, even though it may fall short of expectation, the discrepancy will be disregarded – assimilation will operate and the performance will be deemed as acceptable. If performance falls within the latitude of rejection, contrast will prevail and the difference will be exaggerated, the produce/service deemed unacceptable.

2.1.4 Customer satisfaction theory

What Is Satisfaction?

Satisfaction is an overall psychological state that reflects the evaluation of a relationship between the customer/consumer and a company-environment-product-service. Satisfaction involves one of the following three psychological elements: cognitive (thinking/evaluation), affective (emotional/feeling), and behavioral.

Expectations and Customer Satisfaction

Expectations are beliefs (likelihood or probability) that a product/service (containing certain attributes, features or characteristics) will produce certain outcomes (benefits-values) given certain anticipated levels of performance based on previous affective, cognitive, and behavioral experiences.

The above theories of customer service stressed that it is the responsibility of the service giver to solicit the needs and wants of its customers and meet their expectations. Unless, it objectives of profitability and sustainability will be in problem.

Therefore a service delivery organization like Ethiopian airlines should constantly conduct periodic customer satisfaction measurements to identify the gaps between the service provided and how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations.

2.2 Conceptual literatures

2.2.1 Service quality

As it stated by Archana et al, (2012) ideas of (Ostrowski et al, 1993, Butler and Keller, 1992), maintaining sustainability of quality service in a business are the main concerns of business today. Providing quality is not a concern of manufacturing companies alone. The delivery of high-quality service becomes a marketing requirement among air carriers as a result of competitive pressure. Chang and Keller, (2002) also argue from the challenges point of view to satisfy and maintain customers expectation in the airline business and described that quality in airline service is difficult to describe and measure due to its heterogeneity, intangibility, and inseparability, and only the customer can truly define service quality in the airline industry and this will make it difficult to meet airline customers satisfaction by a simple move.

Customer satisfaction is a key point for the existence, profit making and retention of customers in the transport service providers industry. To be exact, if a service giving organization failed to meet customers' expectation on the service it provides it will be difficult to continue providing similar service in today's competitive environment.

Most service giving organizations strive to meet their customers' expectation even they needs to exceed this level and tried to delight their customers. But it is not an easy job to know exactly what customers expecting from the organization. TCRC (1999) described this challenge as follows Transit agencies are concerned with delivering quality service to customers, which is often defined by on-time performance, comfort, safety, and convenience. Transit agencies continually strive to define quality service, yet a problem exists—definitions of such service often evolve from management's perceptions of what constitutes quality. These management definitions may vary significantly from what current and potential customers perceive to be quality service.

For these reasons, concerned organizations need to conduct periodical survey to check the level of their customers' satisfaction on the service they provided and what customers currently expect from the organization. Different researchers conducted customer satisfaction survey on various industries from different perspectives and most of them concluded that periodic check and assessing the level of customer satisfaction is a key factor to live in the competition and they took it as a core business strategy to an organization (Archana et al, 2012).

Kotler et al (2006) satisfaction will also depend on product and service quality. What exactly is quality? Kotler mentioned the definition of American Society for Quality Control which says quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied need.

2.2.2 Customer service

A wide range of calls in terms of variability, and levels of customer service is a complexity inherent characteristic of this kind of services as is a wide variety of customer needs, requirements, perceptions, experience and ability to comprehend instructions and directions.

Unlike material products or pure service it is very difficult to identify the point of satisfaction and dissatisfaction caused by an organization on its customers by the service provided. Meaning satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the sum total of the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that makes up the experience (Bozorgi, 2006)

Reuland et al (1985) suggested that hospitality service consists of a harmonious mixture of three elements the material product in a narrow sense which in the case of a restaurant is the food and beverages, the behavior and attitudes of employees who are responsible to host the guest, servicing the meal and beverages and who come in direct contact with guests, and the environment, the building the layout, the furnishing, the lights in the restaurant.

Some others like Davis & Stone (1985) and Lewis (1987) classified it in to two main groups which are direct and indirect based on the assumption of core and supportive business.

Airline service is a good example to clearly show these two parts as Bozorgi (2006) described it customers first making inquiries and reservations and then checking in their baggage, getting seat assignments, being checked at the gate receiving on-board services in flight and retrieving their baggage at the destination airport. Each of these activities is an operations task that is secondary to the core product of physically transporting passengers and their bags between two airports. But these secondary tasks have a greater potential to generate customer dissatisfaction if

Accordingly, these classification and other observations indicates that although customer service is inherent in services marketing it is carried out as an additional function by many industries (Gilmore, 2003).

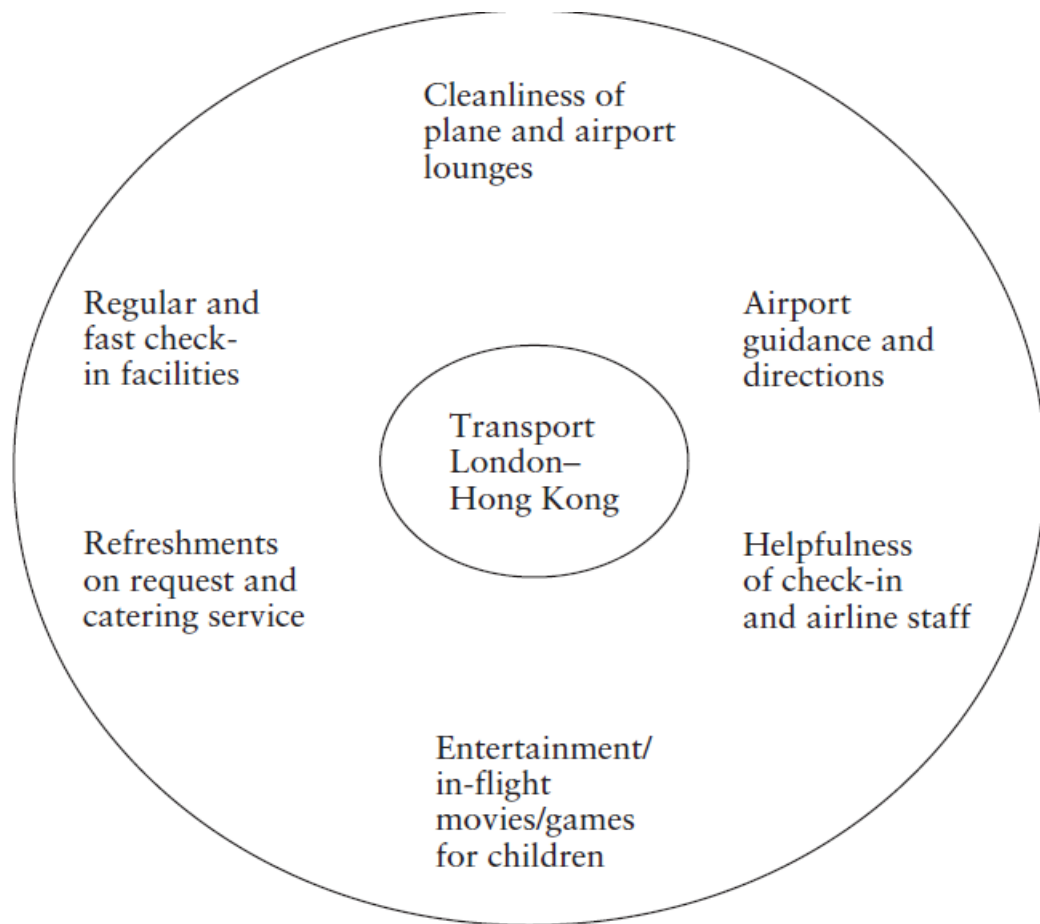
2.2.3 Customer satisfaction

Saxena (2002) defined customer satisfaction as Customer satisfaction is a function of customer expectation from the firm and the actual performance by the firm. Expectation shape a customer's perception of the product/firm performance

Baron and Harris (2003) also described customer satisfaction from three perspectives As Satisfaction may be regarded as

- *An emotion*: an effective response to a specific service experience
- *A fulfillment*: the achievement of relevant goals
- *A state*: the level of reinforcement or

As all the above and other scholars in the field of marketing agreed that customer satisfaction is the calculated result of actual performance of the firm over expectation of the customer and the result can be satisfaction or dissatisfaction.



Source Gilmore Fig 1 Core and secondary aspects of an airline service product

2.2.4 Measurements of customer satisfaction

Gilmore (2003) describe measurement of a customer satisfaction by assuming service provision as a process and in order to measure a service given by an organization it needs to identify the different stages of the process in a given service type. As to him the parts or the stages of experiences of the customer in the process in which the customer will pass and experience are the pre-, during and post-service experience. When someone tried to measure service he/she has to see all the stages of the process.

Litu also saw measurement of customer satisfaction from the advantage it will give to the measuring organization by saying customer satisfaction measurement serves two roles, providing information and enabling communication with customers. With this one is to collect information either regarding what customers say that needs to be done differently or to assess how well an organization is currently meeting its customers need.

2.2.5 Service quality

What exactly is quality? Kotler mentioned definition of American Society for Quality Control which says quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied need. Therefore; satisfaction will depend on product and service quality (Kotler et al., 2006)

Parasurman et al. described service quality as the ability of the organization to meet or exceed customer expectations. It may be defined as the difference between what customers desire and what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Parasurman, Zeithaml, 1998).

Therefore from the above two definitions and point of references we can say that service quality is the antecedent of customer satisfaction.

When we say service quality in the airline service perspective there are peculiar service quality measurement requirements. These requirements are summarized as follows by paraphrasing the classification of Shaw. Shaw (2007) described service requirements by customers by classifying them into seven basic groups.

2.2.6 Service quality in the airline industry

According to Gaddene et al. (2009), Flight safety, good appearance of flight crew and offering highest possible quality services to customers 24 hours a day are the most important airline service quality factors in the eyes of customers. Gustafsson et al. (1999) in their study noted that many airline companies had lost track of the true needs of their passengers and were trapped in outdated views of what airline services were all about. In a highly competitive environment, where all airlines have comparable fares and matching frequent flyer programs, airline's competitive advantages lie in the service quality perceived by customers (Chan and Yeh, 2002).

Perceived quality is a prerequisite for customer satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Therefore, the delivery of high quality service becomes a marketing requirement as competitive pressures increase on air carriers. Continuing to provide high quality service would help airlines acquire and retain customer loyalty (Ostrowski et al., 1993).

1. Frequency and Timings

In short-haul markets, frequency and timings are all important for the business traveler. Because this is so, on almost all routes there will be a very strong correlation between the share of the frequency that an airline holds, and the share of the market it will obtain.

Alongside the question of flight frequency, the timing of flights will also be a vital consideration. A high frequency of flights will be of no value if all the flights are concentrated at the weekend or during middle-of-the-day periods (Shwan, 2007).

2. Punctuality

On the other hand Shwan (2007) described Punctuality of flights is of obvious, crucial, importance to the business traveler, with flight delays meaning inconvenience, missed appointments and, perhaps, the loss of customers. No airline can hope to obtain a large share of the available business travel market if it is saddled with the handicap of a poor punctuality reputation.

3. Airport Location and Access

The other factor described by Shwan (2007) is on short-haul routes, passengers will prefer service from a local, easily accessible airport, rather than from a more distant hub.

4. Seat Accessibility/Ticket Flexibility

“Seat Accessibility” is a piece of aviation jargon which refers to the probability of a passenger being able to book a seat on a flight shortly before it is due to depart. It is an important product need for the business traveler. Some business travel is undertaken in response to a sudden crisis, which requires someone to travel on a “next flight out” basis. In other situations, a flight may be booked well in advance, but at the last minute a change of plan means that the booking must be cancelled and a new one made on an earlier or later flight. This requires that the ticket held by the passenger should be a flexible one, and that seats should be available near to flight departure time on the alternative service. Clearly, an airline can be giving a very high frequency on a route, but this frequency will be of no value to the business traveler if all the flights are fully booked days or weeks in advance. A further aspect of ticket flexibility is that many business travelers expect the right to no-show for a flight, and then to be re-booked on a later one, without any penalty being charged (Shwan, 2007).

5. Frequent Flyer Benefits

Shwan (2007) said that, almost all airlines operate their own Frequent Flyer Program, or are partners in another carrier's program. The evidence is that on short-haul routes flights are chosen on the basis of appropriate departure timing and the availability of a seat. If this is the case, then the offer of Frequent Flyer miles simply acts as a welcome bonus.

6. Airport Service

The other point raised by Shwan (2007) is on a short flight, time spent at the airports at each end of the route may exceed the flight time. An online check-in facility may be even better. Today, they will expect expedited security and passport checks, and that a lounge should be available in which they can relax prior to a flight and make any last-minute phone calls or send emails.

7. In-Flight Service

On short-haul routes, the fact that flight times are short means that in-flight service often assumes a lower priority than frequency, punctuality and airport service in choice-of-airline decisions. Nonetheless, it can still be extremely important. The in-flight experience may be a crucial one for choice-of-airline decisions, even on routes where flight times are only three-quarters-of-an-hour or so. In terms of the factors which will be taken into account in evaluating the in-flight experience, seating comfort in terms of seat pitch and seat width will be significant. A final requirement in terms of in-flight service will be meals and drinks appropriate to the time of day (Shwan, 2007).

With Independent business travelers, the fundamental needs remain exactly the same in terms of frequency, timings, safety, punctuality, seat accessibility and ticket flexibility. Price, though, assumes a greater significance than in the corporate market. Independent business travelers feel that the ticket cost is coming out of their own pocket in the way that the corporate traveler does not, with only the fact that the ticket cost is tax-deductible lessening its impact.

The Independent traveler will therefore trade off cheaper ticket prices against product frills such as standards of seating comfort, free drinks, and in-flight meals.

To be fare in measuring service quality of an airline it will be good to incorporate the above points of service requirement against the service provided by Ethiopian airlines in the historic route

2.3 Empirical literature

This part of the literature review focused on empirical results obtained from similar research works conducted at different times in a different place and organization

Customers are increasingly becoming aware of alternative offerings in the market place, and are thus more demanding in terms of their expectations pertaining to service delivery. As airlines in particular are vulnerable to competitors' offerings, they should offer passengers high levels of service and ensure that passengers are satisfied with their service offering in an effort to build long-term relationships

Main findings from South Africa domestic airline service indicate that the majority of dissatisfied respondents have not formed a long-term relationship with the domestic airline, while satisfied respondents are more inclined to form a long-term relationship (De Meyer, 2010)

Therefore, if customers are dissatisfied with the service they received from an airline they will shift to other service provider. This means service quality has positive correlation with customer loyalty.

The investigation Service Quality of Local Airline Companies in Libya has revealed that, the level of customer satisfaction is moderate, which clearly indicates that there is a mismatch between the airline service quality and the expectations of customers. Generally, customer satisfaction with air service quality is poor or below the satisfactory level in Libya. This implies that, policy makers and industry regulators such as, the Ministry of Transport, as well as the Board of Directors for Air transport in Libya need to be alerted with this empirical fact, and take pragmatic steps to ensure that the domestic airlines and local airports improve their efficiency and effectiveness to provide air services that meet and exceed customer needs, desires and expectations (Manssour et al, 2013).

Findings in Precision Air showed that out of the five independent variables taken only one variable is negatively related with satisfaction of airline passengers (customer services). In contrast, on time performance was satisfactory variable by most of passengers compared to the rest of explanatory variables. Airline safety, schedule integrity and on board services are positively related with passengers satisfaction. Relationship between customer services and satisfaction are negatively related which implies that, there is a need of finding strategies to improve customer services to customers. The paper recommended that the airline should maintain and improve on time performance as this is crucial variable for passenger's satisfaction but other variables need more improvement (Josephat, 2012).

The dimensionality of perceived service quality in international air travel was explored on Indian Air and three dimensions were identified. These dimensions include in-flight service, in-flight digital service and back-office operations. The findings reveal that these three dimensions are positively related to perceive service quality in international air travel and of these dimensions, Cuisines provided, seat comfort safety are the most important dimension in in-flight service quality. Personal entertainment is the most important dimension as perceived by airline passengers in In-flight digital service quality. Online ticket booking is another dimension in back-office operations. In addition, the findings indicate that passengers' satisfaction on different airline companies on basis of the services delivered (Archana , 2012).

A study result on prominent factors of customer satisfaction on domestic Airline Carriers in Indian indicates that customers classified in to six. The first group of customers took call center facilities were their priority. Second group the appearance and attractiveness of cabin Crews were their priority. The third group showed in-flight entertainment service like magazine, newsletter and movies were mandatory. The fourth group recorded that airport lounge were important for them. The fifth group felt that the deciding factor for their satisfaction was the variety of beverages provided in the flight. The sixth group named booking as the deciding criteria for their satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction study by Tirimba, (2012) at Kenyan airline revealed the following there were three main parameters that passengers were most satisfied with as passenger with Kenya airways. These parameters were the aged and disabled were well attended, the

passengers were well informed about such services such as food in good time and during boarding process passengers were promptly attended. These parameters had mean score of 4.33, 4.0, and 4.05 respectively. The scores obtained showed that the level of satisfaction with these

What is evident from this research study is that passengers were keen to note how the elderly and people with special needs were attended to and if well treated the result was a high level of satisfaction. The parameters that scored least in satisfaction and therefore a source of concern since they eroded the competitiveness of the airline were five. These factors were design of toilets and their cleanliness, design of seats and seat comfort, personalized passenger service-knowing passengers by names and the quality of check-in facilities. These parameters had mean ratings of 2.95, 2.94, 2.70, 2.63 and 2.54 respectively, which implied that customer satisfaction levels were less than moderate. From content analysis some passengers complained of being forced to stand in long queues as they waited to be checked-in. The seats available did not meet the expectations of passengers. This revealed that the level of satisfaction with check- in services was moderate.

Majority of the parameters under this construct had mean scores that ranged between 3.11 for crew can be trusted to handle luggage well and passengers' needs and concerns are adequately

2.4 Conceptual framework

This study will conduct a customer satisfaction measure on the historic routes of Ethiopian airlines which will focus on the flight that connects the historic tourist attractions in the northern parts of Ethiopia. These areas are called historic flight routs which incorporate a flight from Addis Ababa, Gonder, Lalibela and Axum. In this flight one can have a flight ticket serving to stop over at each destination and come back to Addis (Ethiopian airlines, 2013).

Therefore the customer satisfaction measure will focus on the services provided by the airline in these destinations based on. Aircraft quality, schedule convenience and

reliability, check in service, in-flight entertainment and meal, service provided by the ground and cabin crews and baggage service.

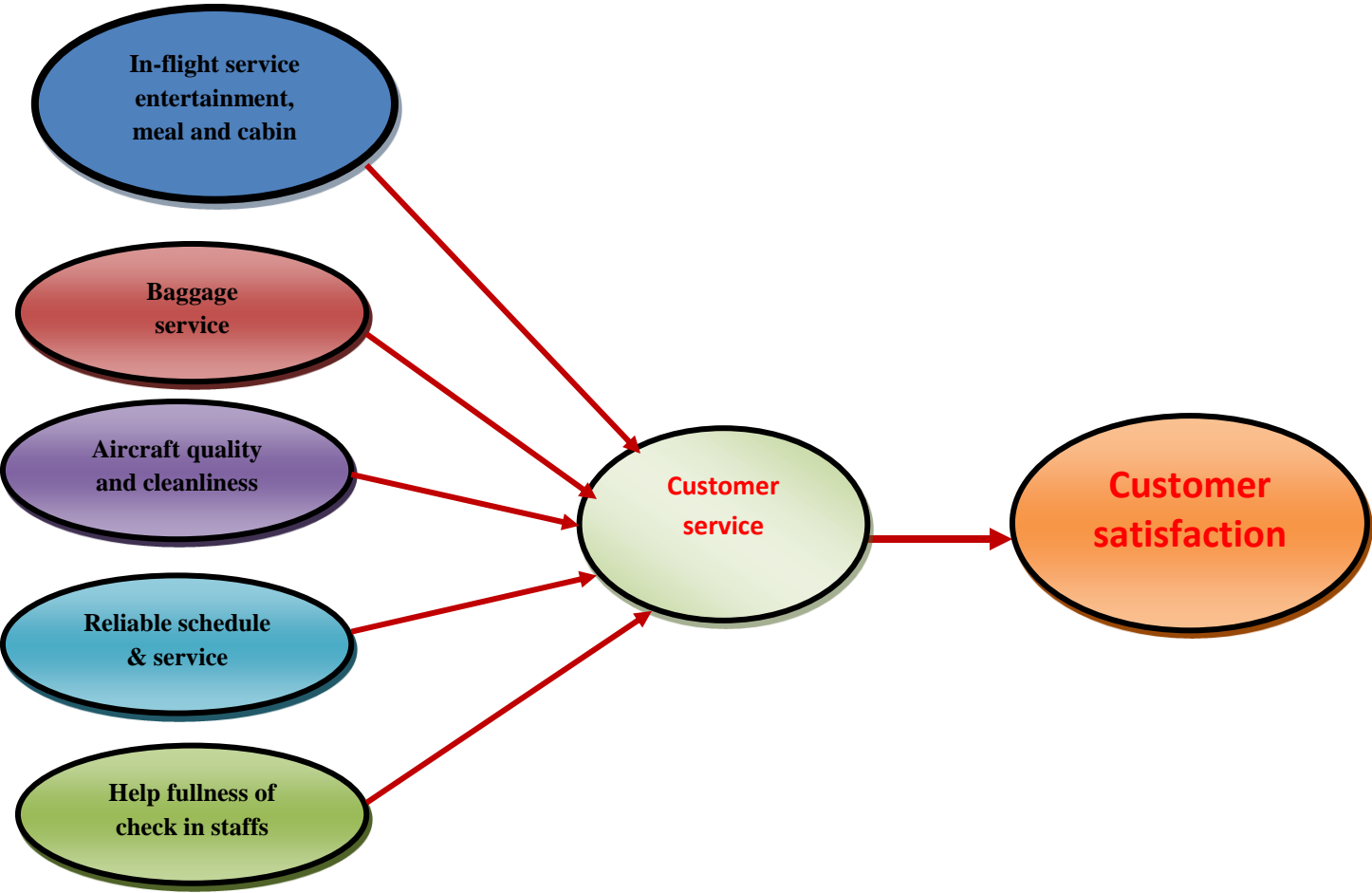


Figure 1: Conceptual framework to show customer satisfaction on the service provided by Ethiopian airlines on historic route

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This section of the research shows the design how the research approached to collect the necessary data from the target population and the way the data was collected. And finally how the gathered data analyzed, interpreted and presented.

3.1 Research design

This research was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research type that basically followed descriptive analysis method to determine the level of customer satisfaction on the service provided by Ethiopian airlines on the historic route based on passengers' response. This design was selected mainly due to the nature of the data collection technique that was used in the research process which was asking opinion of people in the qualitative part and standardized responses in the quantitative side. The research was a cross sectional type that was lasted for forty days.

3.2 Data Source/ Population

The data sources for this research were passengers of Ethiopian Airlines who had the experience of traveling to the historic routes. Meaning passengers who flew with Ethiopian Airlines to Gonder, Lalibela and Axum for tourism and other purpose since 2010 where the airline changes its fleet from Fokker 50 to Q-400 (Ethiopian airlines, 2010).

3.3 Research area

The research was conducted at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, Gonder and Lalibela where the historic route passengers found with enough time to fill the questionnaires.

3.4 Sample size and Sampling technique

The sample size for this research was 120 passengers who had been selected by their experience of flying with Ethiopian airlines in the historic routes. This much sample size was selected by considering the following issues as a determinant factor to made the convenient sampling.

1. Carrying capacity of aircraft operating in this route that was Q-400 with a total of 78 seats.
2. Number of flights per day which was one per day
3. Average load factor of the route 50- 60 seats per day
4. Willingness to fill the questionnaire
5. Number of days the data collection done

Therefore, by taking into account the above facts the researcher targeted to include 1/3 of passengers which equals to 20 voluntaries per flight to fill the questionnaires from each day flight for the survey. This made the total respondent to make it 120 in six consecutive days. Therefore, this study implemented both judgmental and convenient sampling techniques. The six consecutive days were determined for the reason that the data collection time to complete the course lays in this time period.

But it was found very difficult to get that much respondent at Addis Ababa Bole international airport only each day due to inconvenience or shortness of time spent in the airport by passengers who came from the route. Accordingly, the data collection sites were increased to three airports Addis Ababa, Gondr and Lalibela to give more time for passengers to fill the questionnaires while they were waiting the aircraft to return. Due to that the survey lasted for 15 days from its beginning date and 113 questionnaire papers were returned out of the total 120 distributed to respondents. In general there was 94.1% response rate.

3.5 Data collection tool

The data collection tool utilized was a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire type.

The questionnaire had two major classes that were

1. Demographic data about the passengers
2. Customer satisfaction measurement part
 - a. Customer level of satisfaction with the check-in service of the airline
 - b. Customer level of satisfaction with the In-flight service/onboard products provided by the airline
 - c. Customer level of satisfaction with the in-flight service staffs
 - d. Customer level of satisfaction with airport services which include (baggage service, check in staff attitude and so on.

In the first demographic part of the questionnaire, participants were expected to answer basic questions of demographic records of age, gender, income, purpose of flight, and the number of flight the respondent made in this route.

- In the second part the passengers were asked to reflect their level of satisfaction with the respective service provided by Ethiopian airlines that had five scales (Likert scale) strongly dissatisfied, dissatisfied, Neutral, satisfied and strongly satisfied. This Likert's scale was selected because of its symmetrical nature that can avoid biasness and continuity of response of questions was maintained.

3.6 Data Analysis

The Data that were gathered by the questionnaire were organized using MS-excel spread sheet. The organized data were analyzed through relevant statistical techniques descriptive and correlation analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. And the result of the analysis presented using tables and graphs.

A very common measure of reliability in the research literature is Cronbach's alpha. It is used to assess the internal consistency reliability of several items or scores that the researcher wants to add together to get a summary or summated scale score. Alpha should be positive and usually greater than .70 in order to provide good support for internal consistency reliability (George et.al, 2004). Accordingly data reliability test was done on the variables tested in this research and a result of Cronbach's Alpha 0.794 obtained which indicates the data is consistent.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter of the research the collected data from the respondents were organized, analyzed and interpreted using different statistical analytical methods and data presentation techniques. Respondents in this research were passengers of Ethiopian airlines who had the experience of flying to historic routes namely Gonder, Lalibela and Axum. 113 questionnaire papers were returned out of the total 120 distributed to respondents. In general there was 94.1% response rate. From the returned questionnaires three were not properly filled and discarded during data analysis. The rest 109 responses which were properly filled and returned were analyzed as follows.

4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

This analysis is done to show some demographic characteristics of respondents who were participated in the research.

Table 1 Socio – demographic distribution of passengers

Socio demographic characteristics	Frequency	percentage
Gender		
Male	52	48
Female	57	52
Total	109	100
Age (years)		
20-34	11	10
35-49	41	38
50-64	35	32
65-79	13	12
80-94	9	8
Total	109	100

Source: Field survey, January 2014

From the above table there is no significant difference in number regarding gender for this route but when we look at the citizenship of passengers most of the passengers are non-

Ethiopians since the route is passing over the tourist destinations of the country. In addition as age increases above 35 there is a tendency to travel on tourist areas as shown in the table.

4.2 Socio- Economic characteristics

This characteristic of the respondents were collected and analyzed because paying capacity to the service was taken as a key factor to consume the service.

Table 2. Income of respondents' in Ethiopian Birr per month

Citizenship	Mean	N	Minimum	Maximum	Range	% of Total N
Ethiopian	5540.32	31	2000	13000	11000	28.4%
Non Ethiopian	92765.38	78	40000	140000	100000	71.6%
Total	67958.26	109	2000	140000	138000	100.0%

Source: Field survey, January 2014

As we can see from the above table the average monthly income to Ethiopian who had responded to the questionnaire was 5540 ETB but for those of non-Ethiopian were 92765ETB which is 17folds. Meaning more non Ethiopians passengers earn more income than Ethiopians passengers in this route.

So the price increment done on domestic flights (the Reporter, 2013) by Ethiopian airlines is logical and cannot affect those foreigners who were major flyers of the route compared to Ethiopians.

4.3 Passengers' satisfaction over the services provided by Ethiopian airlines in the historic route

4.3.1 Airport services

In this perspective eight basic airport services were tested and the following data were collected and analyzed accordingly.

4.3.1.1 Baggage service

As it is seen on the bellow pie chart majorities of the respondents were satisfied and strongly satisfied 50% and 34% respectively with the baggage service they received at airports in the historic route. Ethiopian has a good baggage service meaning has less number of missing and delay of baggage service. This can be the fact that the airports in these areas handle one to two flights per day and the numbers of passengers were small compared to international terminals.

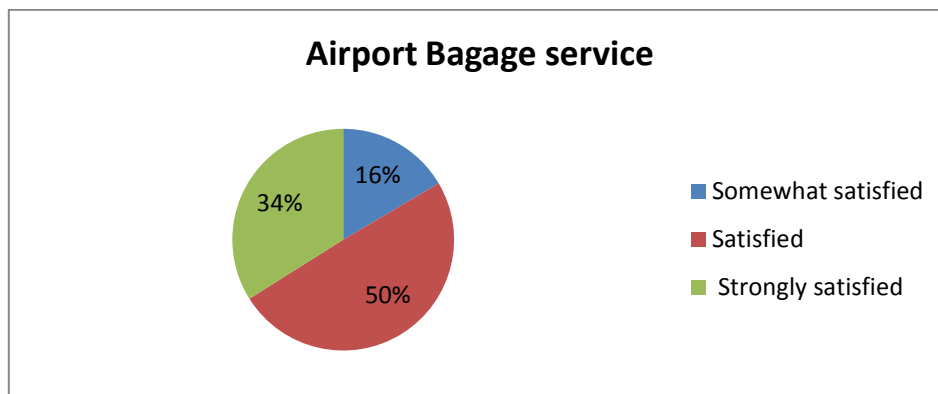


Fig.3. response rate of respondents to baggage service of the airline

4.3.1.2 Arrival staff assistance

Arrival staff assistance is a major service at the airport which includes information delivery about missed luggage/ baggage, time of next flight or any hotel accommodation. Therefore in this research this service of the airline was tested and the following result was revealed. Passengers rated this service starting from Neutral with 66% and 16% of satisfied. This showed that the service in this regard is somewhat average but needs improvement to change this average perception to the satisfied side.

Table 3. Arrival staff assistance

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	19	17.4	17.4
Neutral	72	66.1	83.5
Satisfied	18	16.5	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

4.3.1.3 Boarding efficiency

This is the process where the passengers check-in and pass the time for embarking the aircraft. In this regard the airline position per the response of the passengers was encouraging as it is seen in the table below which accounts a huge agree and satisfied response. To be exact 77% of the respondents were satisfied and strongly satisfied with the way the boarding procedures conducted. This can be due to the fact that boarding procedure dictates passengers to be segregated to each gate for their immediate flight.

Table 4. Boarding efficiency

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	5	4.6	4.6
Neutral	19	17.4	22.0
Satisfied	80	73.4	95.4
Strongly satisfied	5	4.6	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

4.3.1.4 Check in staff attitude

This process is where the passenger came in contact with the assigned check in staff in a dedicated check in counter for the first time in a one to one communication. This is also where passenger travel documents and eligibility to fly will be tested. Accordingly, the

conduct of these front line staffs at this point has significant impact over passengers' preference of airline.

Therefore, respondents of this research to the attitude of check in staffs were as follow.

Table 5. Check in staff attitude towards passengers

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly dissatisfied	3	2.8	2.8
dissatisfied	32	29.4	32.1
Neutral	58	53.2	85.3
satisfied	16	14.7	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

As it is shown in the table above nearly 32 % of the respondents was in dissatisfied and strongly dissatisfied position. The other 53% were not fully satisfied or they had average feeling that can be changed to dissatisfaction if the company will not manage its frontline service provider's conduct towards passengers' request. This staffs are the frontline ambassadors of the airline and their attitude clearly affect passengers' satisfaction same was depicted from the result. This type of attitude may be developed due to lack of knowledge in customer service or lack of proper supervision.

4.3.1.5 Check-in waiting time

Most passengers do not want to spend much time on check in counters. This attitude of passengers described by Shaw, on a short flight, time spent at the airports at each end of the route may exceed the flight time. It is therefore not surprising that airport service should be a significant factor in choice-of-airline decisions. Business travelers will demand the opportunity to check in very late for a flight, by using a separate check-in desk to guard against the possibility of being delayed by a long line of less time-sensitive travelers. An online check-in facility may be even better (Shaw, 2007). Even they prefer to check in online without coming to the check in counter. From the results of the study on the respondents perception of Ethiopian check in time was extended as shown in the bellow table and passengers were not comfortable.

Table 6. Check in waiting time

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly dissatisfied	3	2.8	2.8
Dissatisfied	32	29.4	32.1
Neutral	53	48.6	80.7
satisfied	21	19.3	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

Due to the fact that there was only 19.3% of the respondents satisfied with the check in time spent at the checking counter.

4.3.1.6 Check in service efficiency

This check in efficiency can be a result of multiple factors like staff inefficiency, system inefficiency, lack of supervision and lack of infrastructure. Even though this research did not identify the exact cause of inefficiency because it is not in its scope, but service perceived by the passengers was not satisfying. This was supported by the response of respondents and the dissatisfaction accounts nearly 60%. Therefore, Ethiopian airlines should identify the root cause for this inefficiency and take appropriate action.

Table 7. Checking in service efficiency

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly dissatisfied	13	11.9	11.9
dissatisfied	52	47.7	59.6
Neutral	39	35.8	95.4
Satisfied	5	4.6	100.0

Source: Field survey, January 2014

4.3.1.7 Punctuality of departure and arrival

This punctuality of flight times is a result of different computing factors as stated by Shaw this are airport congestion, aircraft status, flight planning and so on (Shaw, 2007). This research took all the above mentioned factors results as one and tested it as punctuality of the airline. The respondents' perception was encouraging as it is shown in the table below. The result was 58.7% satisfied, 11.1% strongly satisfied and 27.5% Neutral. 96% of the respondents agreed on the punctuality of the airline to its scheduled flight. This can be due to the chaining of Fokker 50 s by the new aircrafts Q-400. Because the Q-400 are new and have low ground time due to maintenance problem as per annual report of Ethiopian CEO (Ethiopian, 2013).

Table 8. Punctuality

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	4	3.7	3.7
Neutral	30	27.5	31.2
Satisfied	64	58.7	89.9
Strongly satisfied	11	10.1	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

4.3.1.8 Flight cancelation

Even though it is costly to cancel a scheduled flight to the airlines, they will be forced to incur this cost for unforeseen circumstances (Shaw, 2007). In this research passengers were asked for their experience of facing any flight cancelation and they responded that majority which is 80.7% satisfied with the reliability of the airline to scheduled flights as per the bellow table while flying Ethiopian to the historic route.

Table 9. Flight cancellation

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	3	2.8	2.8
Neutral	18	16.5	19.3
satisfied	88	80.7	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

Consequently, the overall airport services provided by the airline were summarized or passengers, response to each airport services summed and divided to the number of services under this category and the result indicated that respondents had average or Neutral responses with 74%. But the remaining percentage which was 26% is satisfied as the chart depicted bellow. This indicates that the overall airport service was average

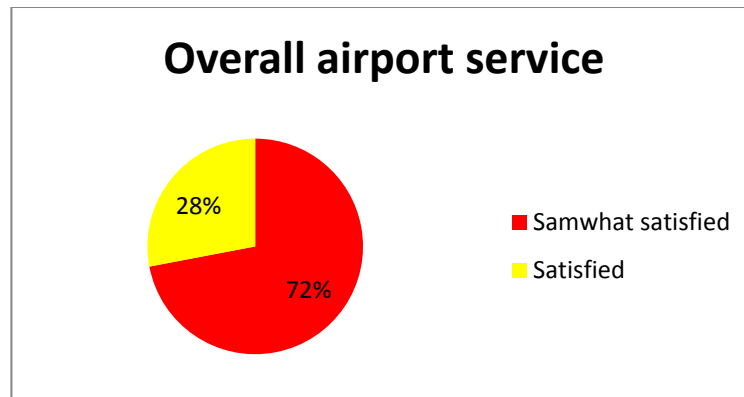


Fig 4 General airport service response of passengers

4.3.2 Onboard products

This part of the airline service starts after the passenger embarked in the aircraft. In this part of the research a total of four variables were taken and tested to assess the perception of respondents. The results of the analysis presented as follows.

4.3.2.1 Seating comfort

All aircrafts have their own type of seat types and seat configurations the following parameter was designed to test passengers' response over the comfort of seats on aircraft of Ethiopian in the historic route.

Table 10. Aircraft Seat comfort

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	12	11.0	11.0
Satisfied	77	70.6	81.7
Strongly satisfied	20	18.3	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

From the above table passengers were comfortable with the aircraft seats. Ethiopian airlines claimed that it has brought in brand new aircrafts of Q-400 type (Ethiopian, 2010) which have been dedicated to domestic flights. With similar response passengers expressed their satisfaction with 11% Neutral, 70.6% satisfied and 18.3% strongly satisfied rates.

4.3.2.2 Cleanliness of cabin

The aircraft over all cleanliness was taken as an indicator to customer service quality and it was tested and analyzed as follows.

Table 11 Cleanliness of cabin

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	9	8.3	8.3
Neutral	39	35.8	44.0
Satisfied	50	45.9	89.9
Strongly satisfied	11	10.1	100.0

Source: Field survey, January 2014

As it is shown in the above table the aircraft cabin cleanliness was rated as Neutral, satisfied and strongly satisfied with 35.8%, 45.9% and 10.1% respectively. Ethiopian airlines have a dedicated department for aircraft cleaning by the name appearance control (Ethiopian, 2013). That is why the aircrafts appeared clean under the responses’.

4.3.2.3 Cabin toilet cleanliness

The same also holds for the cabin toilet system and it was found that it was functional and appealing to use. This was depicted over the response of passengers on the following table

with high satisfaction rate. Since the flight was a short time flights the chance of using toilets is very minimal and the aircraft toilet can stayed for longer period without servicing and people prefer not to use aircraft toilet unless it is critical. The same was reflected by the respondents they found out the aircraft was clean and appealing to use by 100% of satisfaction as shown in the bellow table.

Table 12 Cleanliness of toilet

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfied	51	46.8
Strongly satisfied	58	53.2
Total	109	100.0

Source: Field survey, January 2014

4.3.2.4 On board catering

The flight time from Addis Ababa the base station of Ethiopian airlines to the tourist destinations took maximum of 1 hour. Within this short period of time the airline provides snacks, juice, coffee, tea and soft drinks (Ethiopian, 2013) based on passengers preference. This service was appreciated by respondents to the level that 72.4 % of satisfactions with the meals as shown below.

Table 13. Onboard catering

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
strongly dissatisfied	2	1.8	1.8
Dissatisfied	11	10.1	11.9
Neutral	17	15.6	27.5
Satisfied	77	70.6	98.2
Strongly satisfied	2	1.8	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

In general, the onboard product services provided by Ethiopian were averaged and rated as Neutral and stateside per the responses of the respondents. Satisfaction by the respondents accounts 72% and Neutral 28% as shown in the pie-chart.

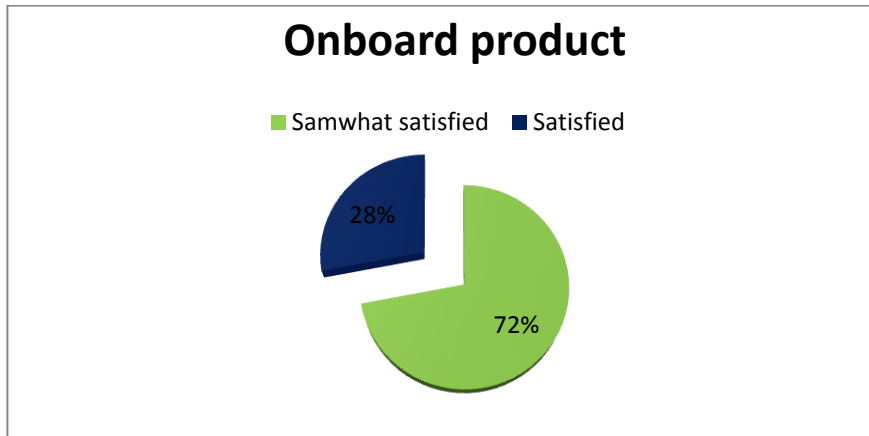


Fig 5. Onboard products over all assessment

4.3.3 Cabin Staff Services

This part of the research focused on the human variables of the service inside the aircraft while onboard to the historic route flights. Basically this communication is taking place between cabin crew members and passengers. In this part a total of five variables were taken as indicators of the level of service quality provided by the cabin crews to passengers. The five variables were consolidated in one table and presented as follows.

Table 14 Cabin staff over all trait assessment

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent
Language skill		
Satisfied	35	32.1
Strongly satisfied	74	67.9
Total	109	100.0
Grooming		
Satisfied	42	38.5
Strongly satisfied	67	61.5
Total	109	100.0

Service efficiency		
Neutral	2	1.8
Satisfied	50	45.9
Strongly satisfied	57	52.3
Total	109	100.0
Friendliness of staffs to passengers		
Dissatisfied	1	.9
Neutral	13	11.9
Satisfied	48	44.0
Strongly satisfied	47	43.1
Total	109	100.0
Interaction with passengers		
Dissatisfied	2	1.8
Neutral	14	12.8
Satisfied	42	38.5
Strongly satisfied	51	46.8
Total	109	100.0

Source: Field survey, January 2014

From the above table it is clearly seen that the cabin staffs attitude and service efficiency were very satisfactory to all passengers. This result proved that the standard the airline cabin crews have and close supervision was consistent and good.

4.3.4 General satisfaction

Satisfaction is a psychological constructs that form the basis upon which evaluation of the quality of a product or service is done. Today, customer focus and satisfaction is a driving force for many companies and organizations. Measuring customer satisfaction provides an indication on how an organization is performing or providing products or services. Customer satisfaction is generally understood as the satisfaction that a customer feels when comparing his/her preliminary expectations with the actual quality of the service or product acquired (Manani et.al, 2013).

Accordingly the overall satisfaction rate of customers was tested and the following result observed.

Table 15. General service satisfaction

Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	7	6.4	6.4
Neutral	33	30.3	36.7
Satisfied	58	53.2	89.9
Strongly Satisfied	11	10.1	100.0
Total	109	100.0	

Source: Field survey, January 2014

The above table depicted that the satisfaction rate is very encouraging which was 63% (satisfied plus strongly satisfied) responses. But there was also 30 % Neutral among the respondents. The airline has a lot of works to change this average response to satisfied category.

The general satisfaction level on Ethiopian Airline service was correlated against selected services to see the significance of those services over the general satisfaction and the following result was obtained. Selection of variables from each group is done by assuming those services are critical to passenger services quality as per the researchers perception and Shaw's assumption of critical service affecters in airline business (Shaw, 2007)

Table 16. Correlations table for check in staff attitude vs General satisfaction

		General satisfaction	Check in staff attitude
General satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
Check in staff attitude	Pearson Correlation	.376**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field survey, January 2014

As it is depicted in the above correlation table there was a significant positive relation between Check in staff attitude and overall service satisfaction of respondents $r=0.376$. Even though there was no significance in the magnitude of the relation, there was apposite/ direct relationship between attitude of check in staffs and overall satisfaction. That means those staffs attitude has direct relation to the airline service quality. Accordingly, the airline should consider this relationship and give the necessary attention because those staffs are a very determinant factor both in the positive and negative service perception of passengers.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the service quality provided by Ethiopian airlines from the passenger's perspective on the historic routes. The study examined passengers satisfaction based on basic services provided by the airline. Those dimensions were taken in to account and a five level Likert's scale response rate designed. Based on the findings and analysis of the research work the following summaries of findings were drawn and recommendations were forwarded. To continue as a competitive and customer focused airline the airline needs to improve the gaps identified by this research

5.1 Summary of findings

As it was seen on the analysis part the overall performance of the airline was found out encouraging beside some hiccups over services that needs attention based on passengers perception were seen. Those services which were provided by the airline that created dissatisfaction over the passengers identified by the study are presented here.

1. Arrival staff assistance

This job is mainly done by customer service agents with different positions and baggage cargo handlers assigned at airports. Since this people appear with company uniforms they are easily identified and caught by passengers. Therefore their attitude towards Passengers request and providing the right response found dissatisfactory and this accounted a total of 17 % and a 66% Neutral response.

2. Check in staff attitude

Check in staffs' attitude found unsatisfactory with 32% dissatisfaction and 53% Neutral response, even though passengers were Neutral this clearly indicated that the staff in the front desk were not to the level clearly satisfy and give the necessary support to passengers who came to check in. this needs further study why this people typically demonstrate such attitude that dissatisfied passengers. This attitude may arise from handling of different

flights at the same time and work overload. This poor attitude reflected by the staffs may be associated with lack of interest with their jobs or human resource management of the airline can have a problem. This can be also from lack of customer service knowledge or lack of proper supervision.

3. Check-in waiting time

Passengers found dissatisfied with checking time as it is revealed from the analysis table 5. This dissatisfaction can arise from inefficiency of staffs working in the check in area or lack of the necessary infrastructure to shorten the waiting time standing in a queue. On the other hand lack of proper supervision may also contribute to this problem.

4. Check in service efficiency

This problem accounted for inefficiency of staffs or system in use. The dissatisfaction rate is almost 60 % and 35 % Neutral response by passengers. This point has sort of relation with the above finding. These can be associated with the trend of the airline that domestic stations job openings were filled with new marketing school graduates and senior staffs are transferred to the capital or assigned to international outstations. This can lead to inefficiency due to lack of experience on the systems and procedures.

5. Punctuality and flight cancelation

These two attributes are associated to availability of efficient and non-defective aircraft that is augmented with reliable and efficient maintenance personnel together with good planning. The airline worked towards changing the old aircrafts with new efficient aircrafts. This has been reflected by the response of passengers' high level of satisfaction.

6. Aircraft general cleanliness and toilet cleanliness

These services of the airline rated very satisfactory with almost 100% satisfaction which was very encouraging but it has to be sustainable to keep the good work.

In general we can broadly classify those findings in to two staff related and non-staff (aircraft/infrastructure) related factors. Most of the dissatisfactions were from the staff related service and the cause for this gap is not yet determined.

5.2 Conclusion

Customer satisfaction survey like this is a life and sol for customer service providers to show the gap and causes of customer dissatisfaction. As described it is very costly to bring new customers than retaining existing customers (Miskeen, 2013). Ethiopian airline is a transport service provider with a mission and vision of providing quality air transport service to its esteemed passengers. In addition it is working to be a world class airline and choice of airline to its customers by providing quality service (Ethiopian, 2010).

In conclusion knowing how customers perceive service quality provided by Ethiopian airlines is a base for its profitability and competitiveness. Measuring service quality can help management provide reliable data that can be used to monitor and maintain improved service quality. Therefore, improving aircraft quality and other infrastructures only will not be a solution to bring and sustain customer satisfaction. From this research we can conclude that the arrival staff assistance, check-in staff attitude and check-in time were fund less satisfactory to respondents so those services needs to be improved by the airline to meet its customer's expectation in one hand and to continue as a profitable airline. In addition there were services with higher score of Neutral responses which are average by the responses of the passengers like cleanliness of cabin, onboard catering cabin staff interaction with passengers also needs to have attention.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations are forwarded to improve the service quality of Ethiopian airlines in its historic route flights.

- Both findings from arrival staff assistance and check in staff attitude indicated that there is a question over the behavior of frontline service provider staffs. This non cooperativeness or bad manner can be resulted from lack of motivation on their work or poor human capital management of the airline. On the other hand this may be originated due to lack of having proper infrastructure or trained airline staffs. Therefore, much work needs to be done on human capital of the airline to motivation, engage or train frontline staffs.
- In addition to training, motivating frontline staffs the airline should upgrade its technology inputs or provide the necessary infrastructure to help its employees meet customers' expectations.
- The other finding was lack of getting necessary information by passengers from airport staffs of the airline, to address this problem the airline needs to avail information desk at domestic terminal with a dedicated staff who can respond to any requests of passengers at airports same as it deed at international terminal.
- The airline should assign a supervisor to supervise the performance of frontline staffs.
- The other finding was extended Check in time; this problem can be caused by different factors. To improve the current situation the airline should assign the necessary number of staffs with sufficient knowledge of the system or increase number of check-in desks during pick hours of check in.
- The airline should avail Self check in Kiosks or online check in facilities to reduce extended check in time and unnecessary queue.
- I finally recommend further studies should be conducted to identify the cause for frontline staff inefficiency, disengagement or lack of motivation towards delivering quality customer services on historic route of Ethiopian airlines.

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APPENDICES

Questionnaire

Part I Demographic data

Your Age _____ Your Gender _____ Your country of citizenship _____

Your income (please indicate the currency and period it covers i.e. month or year)

Part II

For the following questions please check on the space provided

The rating that you have to follow is:

1- Strongly dissatisfied

4- Satisfied

2- Dissatisfied

5- Strongly satisfied

3- Neutral

General

Does the general service you received from Ethiopian Airlines meet your expectation?

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Airport Service

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Punctuality in flight time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Flight cancellation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Check in waiting time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Check in service efficiency | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Check in staff attitude | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Boarding efficiency | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Arrivals staff assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Arrivals bag delivery time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Onboard Product

1 2 3 4 5

- Seating comfort
- Cleanliness of Cabin
- Cleanliness of toilets
- Airline Magazine Newspaper service
- Pillow, Blankets
- Onboard Catering

Cabin Staff Service

1 2 3 4 5

- Language Skills
- Grooming and Appearance
- Service efficiency
- Friendliness of staff
- Staff interaction with Passengers
- Total Service Consistency

Airline Website

1 2 3 4 5

- Ease of Site Navigation
- Schedules fares booking
- Product and service information
- Language options
- Seat Reservation

DECLARATION

I, **Yonas Mamo** ID. No. SGS/0070/2004B does hereby declare that this Thesis is my original work and that it has not been submitted partially or in full by other person for an award of a degree in any other university.

Yonas Mamo

Name

Signature & Date

ENDORSEMENT

This thesis has been submitted to St. Mary's University College, School of Graduate Studies for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Mesfin Lemma (Asst. Professor)

Advisor

Signature & Date

ENDORSEMENT PAGE

This thesis has been submitted to St. Mary's University College, School of Graduate Studies for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Advisor

Signature & Date