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SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS IN YENAGOA, BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between service quality and customer patronage of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. This study employed the cross sectional survey research design. The population of the study is all hospital patients in public health institutions in Yenagoa. This population is infinite. Hence, the study randomly accessed 300 patients for the research. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to patients of public health institutions in Yenagoa metropolis, Bayelsa State, only 280 copies were returned representing 93% of the total number of questionnaire distributed. After coding and editing/data cleansing, only 250 copies of the questionnaire were valid to be used, representing 83% of the total number of questionnaire distributed to the respondents. The study employed the use of Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) for testing the hypotheses. This was aided with the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The findings of the study revealed that service quality of health sector improves customer patronage behaviour. The study therefore concludes that service quality implemented by firms improves customer patronage. The study recommends that the public health sector management in Yenagoa should adopt service quality reliability and quality assurance. This will enhance customer satisfaction and retention and lead to positive customers' patronage behaviour.

Introduction

Public health institutions in Yenagoa metropolis in Bayelsa State were established to provide health care services to the citizens who are resident in the city. Because of the importance of health and the position it occupy in human lives, both public and private health institutions exists to care for the health needs and want, preferences and perception of the people in the city of Yenagoa and neighbouring communities (Major, 2020). Thus, this underscores the reasons why both public and private institutions make investments in the sector. However, investment in the health sector is not adequate due to the capital intensive nature of the health industry business. The existing health facilities therefore, are not adequate in meeting the expectations of the citizens (Gamiyu & Erah, 2017).

Pertinent to note in the health industry-sector in Yenagoa metropolis is that, there is relative performance among the existing health institutions in the city. Competition among health services provider is fierced in terms of quality services delivery. Patients are seen switching patronage in search of the right health institutions with superior service quality offerings. Again, the average patient in the city wants to continue patronage with the health services provider who has the right quality services delivery advantages (Kltapci, Akdogan & Dortyol, 2014). Rendition of superior service quality for the health services market in Yenagoa is one of the ways the operating firms in the industry will enjoy continuous patronage and drive their competitiveness and performance in the industry (Ramya, Kowsalya & Dharamipriya, 2019). Service quality offering

by health services providers will help improve the health conditions of patients and ensure continuous patronage of patience which will help enhance shareholders values of the firms.

Service quality is the rendition of the right services by organizations in terms of meeting the requirements and expectations of customers. When the services rendered by the company positively influence customer delight or satisfaction by exceeding or meeting their expectations, service quality has been implemented by the firm (Kurtz & Clow, 2002). Thus, service quality is an assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the clients' expectations. It is also a situation when customers are retained by the services organization. The implication is that customer retention is the laudable measure of service quality (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Ramya, Kowsaluya & Dharanipriya, 2019). Hence, customer retention can bring about customer patronage which is the customer's repeat purchase behaviours exercised towards a particular service provider or business outlet.

The health facilities and human capital were adequate in serving the health needs and wants, preferences and perception of the city dwellers. Today, we have deteriorating health facilities, infrastructure and quality manpower are grossly inadequate. This singular reason has brought down the services quality delivery of the health institutions in Yenagoa. However, services quality differentials among the public health services providers are noticed by the patients and thus, driving their brand switching behaviours in the health services industry sector. What should be the causes of these problems? It is

possible that service quality of most health services providers were not made adequately reliable or one is in doubt if there is service quality assurance put in place by the health services providers. In the face of these speculations or uncertainty, this study examines the relationship between service quality and customer patronage of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between service quality and customer patronage of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The following research questions are raised.

- i. To what extent does reliability relates with customer patronage of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State?
- ii. To what extent does assurance relates with customer patronage of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State?

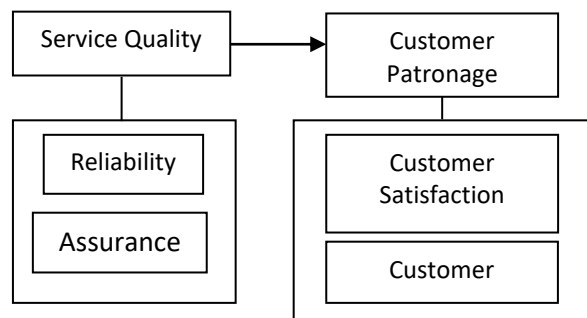


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Patronage

Source: Desk Research, 2022

Literature

There are several theories used for the foundation of every given research. This study employed the technology acceptance theory or model as the research philosophical foundation for the study. The

technology acceptance model or theory emphasizes the factors that influence the acceptance and use of technologies in the workplace. Technological acceptance model is associated with the ground breaking works of (Fishbein & Ajzens, 1975). Thus, academic research of beliefs, attitude and behaviours at work, shows that perceived usefulness and the sense of the ease of use of technologies predict attitudes and actual behaviours at work (Nair & Das, 2011). Importantly, technological acceptance theory or model captures the individual overall attitude toward the use of emerging technologies in industries and workplaces.

The technological acceptance model was hypothesized to mean that one's attitude toward using technology is a function of two beliefs; perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. The perceived ease of the use of technologies is the degree to which individuals at work beliefs that using technologies would require minimal efforts, whereas perceived usefulness is the extent to which technologies enhance job or work performance (Lederer *et al.*, 2000). However, two other concepts of technological acceptance model are a person's attitude toward the use of the system and behavioural intention which is the likelihood that a person will use the system (Lederer *et al.*, 2000). It is argued that perceived ease of the use of technology and perceived usefulness determines one's attitude toward a new technology (Padmavatti, 2016; Deslonde & Becerra, 2018).

According to Momani and Jamous (2017), technology acceptance has become one of the most important subjects in workplaces. It focused on the individual use behaviour towards technologies. This is

because understanding the reason of accepting or rejecting emerging technologies in the world of work is highly laudable (Momani & Jamous, 2017). Thus, the technology acceptance theories have been developed over the years; they are designed to measure the degree of acceptance and satisfaction to the individuals and organization against any technology or information system. This theory is relevant to this present study because service quality implementation for customer patronage in the 21st century requires the use of emergent technology especially the use of information and communication technologies to better serve the customers.

The Concept of Service Quality

Service quality is the process of rendering superior service to the customers segment of an organization. Service quality is important for customer satisfaction and retention (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Thus, companies should strive to satisfy and retain their market through effective and efficient service delivery to the customers. In today's competitive business environment, organizations rendering quality services to customers is a way of enhancing the firm's competitiveness by increasing and defending the companies market position in the industry (Kotler & Keller, 2012). In today's highly competitive business environment, service has increasingly played a critical role in banks' operations. Thus, service quality has emerged as a key strategy adopted to offer quality service to customers (Hamilton-Ibama & Ihunwo, 2022).

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008), service quality is the rendition of services which meet customers' needs and wants, their preferences, perceptions and expectations. In some instances, service quality aim to exceed customers' expectations by providing the right services to the market. Pertinent to note that for a product oriented organization, the company can augment the product sales with service quality while for a services firm, the company can also put in place unmatched services for the customers (Stoner, Gilbert & Freeman, 2013). The whole essence is to retain existing customers, improve customers' life time value and enhance the competitiveness of the company in the industry. Any company that does not come to the market place with quality services is bound to fail and may loose market share and risk extinction in the market.

Dimensions of Service Quality

Service quality has been operationalized by studies into different dimensions. Ramya, Kowsalya and Dharanipriya (2019) divided service quality into four dimensions: customization, reliability, relationship building and assurance. Hacıoglu *et al* (2012) looked at service quality in three dimensions: customer impact, customer relations and reliability. In the same vein, Morris *et al* (2002) operationalized service quality into two dimensions which are customization of service and relationship management. This study adopts the operational definition of Ramya, Kowsalga and Dharanipriya (2019). However, two dimensions from the four were finally adopted for this study.

Reliability

Services rendered by an organization should be reliable throughout the value delivery chains. If services rendered to customers are reliable this will improve trust and repurchase behaviour of customers in the market place (Hacioglu *et al.*, 2012). Hence, the kind of services companies are rendering to customers should be checked to ensure reliability. Reliability can be measured from both at the instance of the organization and the customers. The company can make their services reliable by putting in place service quality in the entire business system. If this is done, customers should see that the service quality is reliable based on their perception.

Important to note that, perceptual differentiation among customers can make the customers see the quality of services rendered differently. According to Hills and Hultman (2015), reliability of service could be defined as when services create the desired satisfaction in the lives of customers. This will form positive experience in the minds of customers about the organization and the services rendered. It is therefore important that all companies, institutions, agencies and government should make their services to be reliable through the provision of service quality which are superior relative to the competition in the industry. Hamilton-Ibama (2020) posited that customers want to do business with companies that keep their promises, particularly their promises about the core service attribute.

Assurance

Quality assurance should be guiding philosophy of all business. It is the responsibility of the company to assure quality services in the services value chain.

One of the ways of assuring service quality is to put in place total quality management (TQM) perspectives into the quality assurance value chain. This perspective emphasizes the issue of customer chain within and outside the organization. For us to serve the outside customers well with quality assurance people in organization should see themselves as customers and strive to satisfy themselves, by so doing, the outside customers will be served with quality services with the right assurance (Stoner, Gilbert & Freeman, 2013).

According to Stoner, Gilbert and Freeman (2013), assurance could be defined as the company guarantying the market that services rendered for clients confirms to specifications and customers' requirements. This should be measured periodically by the organization through the service quality assurance team. The service quality assurance team should periodically take stock to ensure quality assurance for customers so that this will create customer satisfaction and retention in the market. Hamilton-Ibama and Ogonu (2019) study stated that assurance of service quality is an attempt to show whether employees' knowledge, courtesy and ability inspire confidence and trust in the customer. The responses indicate that most managers (99 percent) and customers (77 percent) agree that this is so. It is however important to note that 5 percent of customers do not think that actions of employees inspire trust and confidence in customers.

The Concept of Customer Patronage

One of the behavioural elements of business is customer patronage. This is the central focal point driving entrepreneurship and marketing in the 21st century (Mehran & Morteza, 2013). Organizations should ensure the patronage of customers, this is the way to

build and maintain long lasting relationship with the customers. The company can help the customers to patronize their business through the rendering of service quality, rendering of quality product, and relationship management. If a company focus on satisfying the needs and wants of the customers with the right products and services, this will lead to successful customer satisfaction which will enhance customers' patronage (Hacioglu *et al*, 2012).

According to Rashad (2018), customer patronage is the customers' choices of buying an offering from a particular company, is about purchasing goods and services from an identifiable outlet or product/service provider. Customer patronage is highly important for an organization to be a going concern in the phase of high competition in industries. One of the way by which companies can enjoy patronage from clients is to create build and sustain customer relationship, augmenting this with product and service quality (Rashad, 2018).

Measures of Customer Patronage

In measurement and operationalisation, scholars have operationalised customer patronage into different measures. Ramya, Kowsalya and Dharamipriya (2019) divided customer patronage into two measures which are customer satisfaction and customer retention. However, Hills and Hltman (2015) operationalized customer patronage into three measures: customer satisfaction, repurchase behavior and trust. Again, Rashad (2018) defined customer patronage into four dimensions which are: trust, bond, customer

satisfaction and partnerships. This study adopts the operationalization of Ramya, Kowsalya and Dharanipriya (2019). The variables are customer satisfaction and customer retention.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the measures of customer patronage. This is a situation where the individual consumer or customer has comfort in consuming the firm's products and services. According to Kotler and Keller (2012) customer satisfaction could be defined as the process by which a company's products and service meet the needs and wants and requirements of the customers. Customer satisfaction most time occurs when the entire company's focus and activities are geared towards fulfilling the needs and wants, preferences and perception of the customers. When the needs and wants of the customers are met with appropriate goods and services, customer satisfaction requirements are met (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

Most businesses are always looking for ways on how to serve their customers better. They strive to improve the services of their offering believing the long term success and survival of their organization (Hills & Hulton, 2015). Serving the customers better is a way of obtaining better patronages from the customers. Again, from service quality, closeness and relationship management will help the company obtain intelligence from the market, this help the company to serve the customers and create customer satisfaction.

Customer Retention

Customer retention is a laudable measure of customer patronage. It is only retained customers that will continuously buy or patronize the company's product or service and make the company to enjoy customers' life time value (Rashad, 2018; Hills & Hultman, 2015). Hence, customer retention is when customers are bonded with the company's products and services and continuing to buy the company's offerings. These offering can be in the form of goods or services. Successful customer retention starts with the first contact an organization has with a customer and continues throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship (Hamilton-Ibama & Ihunwo, 2022).

More money, time and efforts are spent attracting new customers to their services/products rather than retaining customers after a purchase. As a result, there is a paradigm shift in the marketing environment to a more reasonable alternative i.e. customer retention through service quality (Hamilton-Ibama, 2020). Businesses operating in any sector in any nation should ensure the satisfaction and retention of their customer group. This will always influence patronage and repurchase behaviour (Jones & Rowley, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Organizations should ensure that they design products and services according to the needs and wants of the market. This will enhance customer satisfaction and lead to sustained positive purchase behaviour. It is important for all organizations to serve their customers better than the competition.

This will enhance customer satisfactions and lead to positive customer purchase behaviour. Pertinent to note that,

inability of a company to retain its customers will lead to customers' turnover and defection to the competition. For a company to forestall customers' turnover or reduce turnover and defection rates, effective and efficient customer service should be carried out by the management through the customers' services units (Stoner, Gilbert & Freeman, 2013).

Service Quality and Customer Patronage

Implementation of service quality by an organization usually leads to customer patronage. This foregoing is validated by studies. Wamburgu *et al* (2015), investigated the relationship between service quality and business performance in the context of agro-processing industry in Kenya. The study employed structural equation modeling and the findings show that service quality of agro-processing firms enhances business performance of such firms. This findings is corroborated with the works of Bature *et al* (2018), the scholars examined the quality improvement at work and business performance in the context of manufacturing organizations.

Bonaventure, Amah and Williams (2017) study employed Spearman rank order correlation and the finding of the study reveals that the service quality of entrepreneurs enhances business performance. In contrast, Otika, Nwaizugbo and Olise (2019) discovered non-significant relationship between proactiveness service quality and business performance in the context of SMEs in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Reliability and Customer Patronage

Product or service reliability in the market help influences customer patronage. This position is supported with previous

studies. Ibudummi *et al* (2018) discovered that entrepreneurial product or service reliability improves business performance. This is also in agreement with the works of Hacıoglu *et al* (2012). Their study discovered that the reliability of a company's offerings in the market help to positively influence business performance. The finding above is in agreement with the works of Mugambi and Karugu (2017). They studied the relationship between reliability of company offerings and business performance. It was revealed that, it was positive and significant in the context of Nairobi, Kenya. Furthermore, reliability of a product or service of an organization is a laudable condition for customer satisfaction which leads to customer patronage. The works of Kazemi *et al* (2019) is highly supportive. The scholars investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial product reliability and company competitiveness. The study employed qualitative research and the finding is that, reliability of a company's offerings in the market place influence business performance in the context of manufacturing organizations.

Hamilton-Ibama (2020) study shows that there is no significant relationship between reliability and customer retention. Hamilton-Ibama (2020) study examined the relationship between reliability and the performance of banks in Nigeria. The inferential statistics was done using Spearman rank order correlation coefficient. The result of the investigation which is based on 56 copies of questionnaire retrieved from managers revealed that there is no significant relationship between reliability and customer retention. Furthermore, previous literature in

the service industry compared reliability with business performance as a whole. They found that reliability has significant positive impact on business performance (Beh, 2008; Vong, 2007; Wisniewski & Wisniewski, 2005; Rose *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, the findings of Agundu and Olotu (2011) suggest that reliability has a positively significant relationship with business performance. Gulati (1995) also compared reliability with one aspect of business performance (customer retention). He observed that while satisfaction may be one important driver, reliability also influences retention of customers both independently and in tandem. From the studies above, reliability implementation by firms enhance customer patronage. We therefore state the following hypotheses.

Ho₁: Reliability has no significant relationship with customer satisfaction of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Ho₂: Reliability has no significant relationship with customer retention of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Assurance and Customer Patronage

In any work organization, product and service quality assurance lead to customer patronage. This position is validated with the study of Alawati (2017). The scholars investigated the association between product quality assurance and business performance in the context of SMEs. The study findings is that, product quality assurance improves customer patronage.

The assurance of a company offering in the market improves customer patronage. It is expected that, companies should place quality assurance in the entire value chain,

this will make customers to patronize our offerings and quality lead to business performance. Companies wishing to improve the patronage of customers should enhance quality assurance both for the product and the services. Assurance of quality should permeate the entire organizations system. To operationalise assurance, the total quality management improve system should be adopted. The TQM perspective whether for services or product oriented companies, is what will ensure quality assurance in the company's value delivery chain. From these expositions, the assurance of quality offerings in the market will improve customer patronage. The following hypotheses are stated.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between assurance and customer retention of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Methodology

This study employed the cross sectional survey research design. The population of the study is all hospital patients in public health institutions in Yenagoa. This population is infinite. Hence, the study randomly accessed 300 patients for the research. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to patients of public health institutions in Yenagoa metropolis, Bayelsa State, only 280 copies were returned representing 93% of the total number of questionnaire distributed. After coding and editing/data cleansing, only 250 copies of the questionnaire were valid to be used, representing 83% of the total number

of questionnaire distributed to the respondents. The study employed the use of Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) for testing the hypotheses. This was aided with the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 22.0

Analysis and Results

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Table 1: Correlation between Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

	Correlation	Reliability	Customer Satisfaction
Reliability	Pearson corr. Sig. (2 tailed)	1.000	0.75
	N	250	250
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson corr. Sig. (2 tailed)	0.75	1.000
	N	0.032	250

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Source: SPSS output version 22.0

Table 1 shows correlation coefficient of 0.75 and probability value of 0.032 which is less than the critical value of 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypotheses and accept the alternate hypothesis which states there is significant relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between reliability and customer retention of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Table 2: Correlation between Reliability and Customer Retention

	Correlation	Reliability	Customer Retention
Reliability	Pearson corr.	1.000	0.76
	Sig. (2 tailed)	250	0.029
	N	250	250
Customer retention	Pearson corr.	0.76	1.000
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.029	250
	N	250	250

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Source: SPSS output version 22.0

Table 2 shows correlation between reliability and customer retention. Hence we have a correlation coefficient of 0.76 and a probability value of 0.029. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate which states; there is significant relationship between reliability and customer retention of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Hypothesis Three

Assurance has no significant relationship with customer satisfaction of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Table 3 Correlation between Assurance and Customer Satisfaction

	Correlation	Assurance	Customer satisfaction
Assurance	Pearson corr.	1.000	0.81
	Sig. (2 tailed)	250	0.031
	N	250	250
Customer satisfacti on	Pearson corr.	0.81	1.000
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.031	250
	N	250	250

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Source: SPSS output version 22.0

Table 3 indicates a correlation coefficient of 0.81 and a probability value of 0.031 therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis which states; there is significant relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction. Thus assurance significantly predicts customers’ satisfaction.

Hypothesis Four

Assurance has no significant relationship with customer retention of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Table 4: Correlation between Assurance and Customer Retention

	Correlation	Assurance	Customer Retention
Assurance	Pearson corr.	1.000	0.85
	Sig. (2 tailed)	250	0.032
	N	250	250
Customer retention	Pearson corr.	0.85	1.000
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.032	250
	N	250	250

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Source: SPSS output version 22.0

Table 4 illustrates the correlation coefficient at 0.85 and the critical value is 0.035, we therefore, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis which states; assurance has significant relationship with customer retention in the context of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between Reliability and Customer Patronage

This study investigated the service quality dimension of reliability relationship with the measures of customer patronage; customer satisfaction and customer retention. The finding of the study is that, reliability positively and significantly relates with the measures of customer patronage (customer satisfaction and customer retention). This finding is highly supported by the study findings of Hacıoglu *et al* (2012), Mugambi and Karugu (2017), and Kazemi *et al* (2019). Hence, all of these findings discovered service quality improvement on business performance in different context. Thus, the element of service quality; reliability enhances customer patronage measures of customer satisfaction and customer retention.

This study result is not supportive of earlier findings of Hamilton-Ibama (2020) in this regard. Hamilton-Ibama (2020) study shows that there is no significant relationship between reliability and customer retention. Furthermore, previous literature in the service industry compared reliability with business performance as a whole. They found that reliability has significant positive impact on business performance (Beh, 2008; Vong, 2007; Wisniewski and Wisniewski, 2005; Rose *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, the findings of Agundu and Olotu (2011) suggest that reliability has a positively significant relationship with business performance. Gulati (1995) also compared reliability with one aspect of business performance (customer retention). He observed that while satisfaction may be one important driver, reliability also influences retention of customers both independently and in tandem.

Relationship between Assurance and Customer Patronage

The relationship between assurance, a dimension of service quality and customer patronage measures of customer satisfaction and customer retention were found to be positive

and significant. Assurance laudably predicts outcomes in customer satisfaction and customer retention in a context specific of public health institutions in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. These findings are in agreement with the works of Alavati (2017), Wamburgu, *et al.*, (2015), Bature *et al* (2018), Bonaventure, Amah and Willams (2017). Hence, service quality assurance implemented by firms enhances customer patronage indicators such as customer satisfaction and customer retention. This finding quite contrast with the study findings of Otika, Nwaizugbo and Olise (2019). The authors empirically discovered non-significant relationship between proactiveness, service quality and business performance in the context of SMEs in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the relationship between service quality and customer patronage in the context of public health institutions in Yenagoa Bayelsa State. From our empirically study we concluded that, service quality of health institutions improves customer patronage of such institutions. Therefore, service quality improvement predicts customer patronage outcomes such as customer satisfaction and customer retention. In view of the conclusion the following recommendations are made:

- i. The Health institution in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State should improve on their service quality in their entire services value chain. This will help enhance customer patronage of health sector services in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.
- ii. The health sector institutions particularly public firms should ensure that their service qualities are reliable. This will enhance customer satisfaction and retention.
- iii. The organizations in the public sector health industry should employ quality assurance through total quality management improvement. This will help influence customer satisfaction, their retention and overall impact on customer patronage.

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