



## Assessing university students' satisfaction with on-campus cafeteria services



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### ABSTRACT

In this study, perceptions of different service attributes that have an impact on university students' overall satisfaction were examined. Students using different university cafeterias were selected through convenience samples of different college students at the university. A total number of 543 valid questionnaires were used for statistical analysis. Results indicated that student satisfaction with different service attributes was below average. Moreover, all service attributes were found to have a significant and positive impact on the overall student satisfaction. Based on the results of the current study, several recommendations were derived for university management to increase student satisfaction with food and beverage services provided at different university cafeterias.

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### 1. Introduction

Food services are an important component of overall planning that affects the quality of life at universities (Klassen, Trybus, Kumar, 2005). Moreover, the number of students enrolled in universities is increasing continuously, causing the explosive growth of this market (Garg, 2014). This contributes to increasing demands, and consequently, competition between foodservice operators inside the university and surrounding operators (Martin, Sneed, & White, 1992). Therefore, the evaluation of university foodservices became essential (Knutson, 2000), because students will go to an off-campus foodservice if the on-campus foodservice facilities do not meet their needs (Eckel, 1985).

Saglik, Gulluce, Kaya, and Ozhan (2014) confirmed that all food service operations should give importance to the quality of service in order to survive in today's competitive market, because foodservice quality is considered an effective factor in satisfying students (Raman & Chinniah, 2011). Also, they need to investigate other important quality requirements, such as food and beverage quality, as well as reasonable prices, in order to be able to satisfy students (Joung, Lee, Kim, Ahn, & Huffman, 2011).

However, no previously published researches investigated the quality of university foodservice in Egyptian universities and its effect on student satisfaction, leaving a gap in the body of knowledge of student opinions and behaviors of the on-campus foodservice in Egypt. This

study aims at addressing this issue through three main objectives. Firstly, university students' perceptions of different service attributes that make up the total dining experience will be investigated. Secondly, the impact of those service attributes on student satisfaction will be measured. Thirdly, a comparison between the importance and significant impact of different service attributes on student satisfaction will be done, in order to identify the most important factor that influences college students' perception of a foodservice operation.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Drivers of student satisfaction in university foodservice cafeterias

Cafeteria foodservices can be found in hospital facilities, nursing homes, child and senior care centers, prisons, schools and university campuses. The demand for foodservice has constantly grown, particularly in universities, as there are a continuously increasing number of students. As a result, these increased demands on university foodservice operations are putting an increased pressure on operators to satisfy students' needs, due to intense competition (Li, 2008). By reviewing the existing literature, there were many factors found to influence students when choosing a foodservice property such as: the quality of food and beverages, the quality of service, value, price, hygiene and cleanliness, location, and product variety (Ng, 2005). For the purpose of the current study, three factors will be investigated in relation to their impact on student satisfaction: food and beverage quality, service quality and the price-to-value relationship.

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## 2.2. Food and beverage quality

Previous studies indicated the important role of food and beverage quality in shaping student satisfaction. Food and beverage quality is the acceptable quality property for customers such as: taste, smell, appearance, size, shape, color, gloss, consistency, and texture (Imram, 1999; McWilliams, 2000). These researchers also emphasized the importance of other quality attributes such as texture, appearance and flavor that distinguish raw from processed food products. Moreover, Oh (2000) found a high positive correlation between consumer satisfaction with food and beverage quality and his/her intention to return again to a specific restaurant. In the same vein, Ng (2005) stated that overall food quality attributes (taste, freshness, and appearance) play a higher important role in achieving or exceeding customer satisfaction and intention to return than other factors such as price, value, convenience and cleanliness. Furthermore, Mattila (2001) found that food quality was ranked as the most important factor for customers targeting a specific restaurant. Other researchers found that “quality of food” was ranked second among another twelve variables, and most students noted that they would deal with on-campus foodservices more often in case of the improvement of food and beverage quality, and keep the dining dollars on campus rather than in off-campus foodservice (Andaleeb & Caskey, 2007; Lee, 2004). Accordingly, we formulate the following research hypothesis:

**H1.** : There is a significant and positive relationship between food and beverage quality and students' overall satisfaction.

## 2.3. Service quality

Abo-Baker (2004) described service quality as the organization's ability to satisfy the customers, within the determination of specifications, characteristics and requirements of service that gratify the desires and needs of customers and exceed their expectations. Yilmaz (2008) stated that service quality can be studied as a phenomenon considered within the context of comparing customers' expectations and perceptions regarding the provided service. In other words, service quality can be determined by customers' expectations and perceptions of service. Therefore, the same service can be perceived as low quality by a customer and as high quality by another customer, depending on the customer's perception of the service offered (Küçükaltan, 2007). If the provided service does not meet or is less than the customers' expectations, then the perceived service quality will be low; if it does exceed the customers' expectations, then the perceived service quality will be high (Akbaba & Kilinc, 2001). Therefore, the term “perceived quality of service” is widely used in the literature instead of the “quality of service”. The perceived quality of service is the gap between the customer's expectations and his/her actual experience of a particular service. In the other words, the magnitude and trend of the difference between customers' expectations and perceived performance are assessed as a result of a comparison between them (Zeithmal & Bitner, 2000). Also, perceived service quality, according to Oliver (1997), has been accepted as an antecedent of customer satisfaction.

According to Andaleeb and Caskey (2007), students' expectations and perceptions regarding the quality of service vary from one student to another and from one semester to the next. Hence, this variation leads to a more complex, diverse and dynamic business environment, a difficulty in measuring service quality, and a difficulty in identifying the determinants of service quality. It is worth mentioning that service operators should enhance the quality of service provided in on-campus outlets to discourage students from searching for alternative foodservice operations off-campus. Students are not limited to on-campus foodservice quality, as they are aware of surrounding foodservice quality (Andaleeb & Caskey, 2007). Indeed, they have the freedom to have their foodservice off-campus (Gassenheimer, Davis, & Dahlstrom, 1998).

Many researchers have attempted to develop valid measurement tools to evaluate service quality in different hospitality establishments. For example, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) defined and built the service quality gap model through ten dimensions to determine the difference between customer expectations and perceptions: (1) tangibility; (2) reliability; (3) competence; (4) responsiveness; (5) courtesy; (6) credibility; (7) convenience; (8) security/safety; (9) communication; and (10) understanding. These ten dimensions were then reduced to five dimensions resulting in the known SERVQUAL instrument (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988). LODGSERV is another instrument, which was designed to assess service quality in hotels and banquet halls (Barsky, 1992; Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, & Patton, 1991). Additionally, Stevens, Knutson, and Patton (1995) adopted and refined the DINSERV scale from SERVQUAL and LODGSERV to assess customers' perceptions of restaurant quality. The DINSERV scale comprises 29 statements in five dimensions of the SERVQUAL scale. It is frequently used to measure the service quality in foodservice operations which is the case of the current study.

Previous researchers have addressed the importance of the quality of service in influencing the satisfaction of customers in foodservice establishments. For example, customers rated service quality as the second significant attribute after the quality of food in influencing their intention to return again to a particular restaurant (Soriano, 2002). Similarly, Ng (2005) found that the dimension of service quality came after food quality in affecting student satisfaction with food service facility. Service quality attributes includes appearance of employees', staff attentiveness, level of service, food items' knowledge, and friendly treatment (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997; Qu, 1997). Accordingly, we formulate the following research hypothesis:

**H2.** : There is a significant and positive relationship between service quality and student satisfaction.

## 2.4. Reasonable price

It is well-known that students have limited budgets that affect their decisions of choosing foodservice operations, as they continually seek reasonable prices (Li, 2008). Klassen, Trybus, and Kumar (2005) found that price is the most significant factor in choosing a food and beverage service provider for students with limited budgets. In the same vein, Nadzirah, Ab-Karim, Ghazali, and Othman (2013) posit that price is the first student concern in a university foodservice, because students buy food on limited funds. Also, they indicated that if the prices of the campus foodservice are too high for students, the students prefer to get cheaper prices from off-campus foodservices. In another study, customers indicated that receiving the right value for the money paid is among the most important factors that encourage them to revisit a foodservice establishment again (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002). Nadzirah et al. (2013) posited that the paid price should be suitable for the food quantity served, so the customer would feel that the product and service received were worth their price, resulting in student satisfaction.

Nadzirah et al. (2013) suggested that the foodservice operators should develop the menu with food and beverage items with more reasonable prices. Thus, the campus foodservice operators should focus on the pricing factor as a significant determinant of student satisfaction. It should also lower the prices so that students would be able to afford to consume food from an on-campus rather than off-campus foodservice. Similarly, other researchers indicated that the operators of on-campus foodservices should focus value for money with an appropriate portion size, in order to guarantee student satisfaction (Ng, 2005; Xi & Shuai, 2009). Moreover, Soriano (2003) asserted that the customers' quality expectations depend on the price they pay for getting the service and when this price increases the quality expectations will increase consequently. In the same study, Soriano (2003) showed that

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