

AN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' CUSTOMER SATISFACTION TOWARDS THE UNIVERSITY CAFETERIA USING A MODIFIED DINESERV METHOD

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Abstract: Customer satisfaction measures the extent to which a customer's needs and desires are satisfied by an organization's product, services and capabilities. In the context of the service industry, several methods of assessing customer satisfaction (and indirectly, the quality of the provided service) were developed, mentioning amongst them the SERVQUAL and the DINESERV method. This study makes use of a modified DINESERV survey, targeted towards the satisfaction of university students attending the University of Life Sciences "King Michael I" from Timișoara towards the university cafeteria. The main categories of service quality factors analyzed are assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. The findings of this study address the strengths, weaknesses and potential future prospects for the continued success of the cafeteria.

Key words: customer satisfaction, quality of services, DINESERV, SERVQUAL

INTRODUCTION

The studied university canteen is located in the premises of the University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara, in an area easily accessible to students (Figure 1). The cafeteria is open from Monday to Friday, starting at 11 a.m. until after noon. The canteen has a diversified menu, with a wide variety of dishes; with affordable prices for the target audience – students attending university courses. The canteen is used by all students who want a cooked, hot meal, with a price suitable for the students' budget.



Figure 1. The ULST cafeteria

Every student wants the food to be cooked in a clean kitchen, and the room where the meal is served to be also organized and well-kept. The menu is one of the most important aspects. The menu includes diversified dishes, able to satisfy the wishes and requirements of the students, so that they can choose between the different types of food. This menu is also available online on the cafeteria Facebook page [14] (Figure 2).

<i>Supet Ciorbe</i>		Gramaj	Pret
Supa de pui cu taletel	350g	2,50	
Supa de rosii	350g	2,50	
Supa de pui cu galuste	350g	2,50	
Ciorba de conopida	350g	3,00	
Ciorba de fasole verde	350g	4,00	
Ciorba de varza	350g	3,00	
Ciorba de perisoare	350g	5,00	
Ciorba de cartofi	350g	3,00	
Ciorba de fasole uscata	350g	3,50	
Ciorba a la grec	350g	3,00	
Ciorba taraneasca	350g	3,00	
Ciorba de burta	350g	5,00	

<i>Fel principal</i>		Gramaj	Pret
Paste Carbonara	300g	4,50	
Paste cu ciuperci si smantana	300g	4,00	
Escalop de porc cu ciuperci	100g	6,50	
SUNCA PANE	100g	3,00	
Paste Bolognese	300g	4,50	
Anpi cu sos	100g	4,00	
Mici cu paine si mustar	90g	4,00	
Snitel piept de pui cu fulgi de porumb	100g	4,50	
Carnati prajit	100g	2,50	
Copanele la cuptor	150g	4,00	
Gratar de piept pui	100g	5,00	
Snitel de porc	100g	4,00	
Cascaval pane	100g	3,50	
Gratar de porc cotlet	100g	5,00	
Snitel de pui	100g	4,00	

<i>Fel principal</i>		Gramaj	Pret
MUSACA DE CARTOFI	150g		
Pulpa de pui dezosata la gratar	100g	5,00	
Rulada cu carne	100g	5,00	
Chiftele din pulpa porc	100g	4,00	
Gordon bleu cotlet porc cu sunca si cascaval	100g		
Costite prajite	100g		
Peste	100g	4,00	
CIOLAN AFUMAT CU VARZA			
Piept de pui cu bacon si castraveti	100g		
COTLET GRATINAT	100g		
Ficatei de pui	100g	3,00	
Piept de pui umplut	100g	6,00	
Carnati la gratar	100g	4,00	
Pulpe de pui la tava cu os	100g	5,00	
Sarmalute	100g	3,00	

Feluri de mancare disponibile astazi

Figure 2. An example of a menu at the ULST cafeteria

For a better organization of serving in the canteen, first the students read the menu, choose the dishes they want, and then pay at the checkout. With the voucher received, the students go to the serving line and receive the ordered food. This organization also helps the staff, to be as efficient as possible, but also the students to be served in the shortest possible time.

The cafeteria is also subject to the rules and regulations imposed by the ULST management, adding an additional measure towards quality assurance [15].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, we aim to measure service quality by utilizing a modified DINESERV methodology. This method is derived from the SERVQUAL method, which assesses quality in the service industry. The initial steps carried out in this study were to carry out a preliminary analysis of the deficiencies contained in the hotel, especially in the field of service quality. After analyzing the problems found in the hotel, the researchers distributed questionnaires to consumers so that the topic of service quality problems could be identified. Meanwhile, with the Servqual-QFD method, it is hoped that a company can prioritize customer needs, find innovative responses to these needs, and improve processes to achieve maximum effectiveness [2]. Determining the research mechanism in the Servqual questionnaire uses a Likert scale rating model with 5 levels of value ranges to avoid the large number of responses choosing neutral answers [4].

SERVQUAL is one of the instruments introduced by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry in 1988 which is used to measure customer satisfaction. The Servqual method uses a user-based approach, which measures service quality quantitatively in the form of a questionnaire and contains service quality dimensions such as reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, taking into consideration both the customer expectation and the extent to which those desires are fulfilled [8,9,10,11,13].

DINESERV is a tool dedicated to the needs of catering services, it contains questions adapted to the study of the physical environment in the catering establishment and quality service. This method was first proposed by Steven, Knutson and Patton in 1995. [12]. This method is the development of the SERVQUAL method [6]. The physical dimension of a business can greatly affect the success of a business, especially in a restaurant [5]. In this industry, the DINESERV method has been especially developed for measuring service quality. DINESERV highlights customer perceptions of service quality at a restaurant. [3] The dimensions used in the DINESERV method are as follows: assurance, empathy,

reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles, as such being extremely similar to the SERVQUAL method [7]. The DINESERV model is a model that is devoted to measuring the level of service quality of restaurants, restaurants, or cafes specifically, with significant implications to the revisiting intentions and likelihood of recommending the establishment [1].

The methodology used is inspired by this approach, but utilizes a lower number of items in their perceived form.

We consider that the lower amount of items will lead to higher response rates among students. While the present study lacks a measure of the expected service quality, we can consider perfect services (5 on all scales) as an ideal that we can compare to.

Canteen-restaurant - public catering unit where meals are generally served on the basis of subscriptions for unique menus; these units are furnished with simple furniture and inventory. When establishing or re-profiling public catering units, it is recommended to establish the profile of the activity through specialized studies. Obtaining good economic and social results, in a public catering unit, depends to a great extent on the way it was designed, built or remodeled. Each unit, by its specificity, must meet the needs of consumers in the area where it is located. The finishing materials must be attractive, with a pleasant color.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the questionnaire applied to 50 students, the canteen is very well appreciated and is commonly frequented by them.

The average values for the dimensions studied in the survey are expressed in table 1. The most well regarded dimension is reliability, which means that the cafeteria provides consistent services, in line with what is expected of it. Following this, the staff is empathetic to the needs of the students and can accomodate their needs relatively well. The tangible assets are also well regarded, the amenities are modern and to the students' liking. Assurance is the second lowest scored dimension, followed by responsiveness. While all factors are high scoring, responsiveness seems to be an area to be improved.

Table 1.

Average scores of the 5 DINESERV dimensions

Dimension	Average score
Tangibles	4.52
Reliability	4.78
Responsiveness	4.34
Assurance	4.50
Empathy	4.65

We also measured the overall satisfaction experienced by students, as seen in Figure 3. The vast majority reported that they are very satisfied by the services provided.

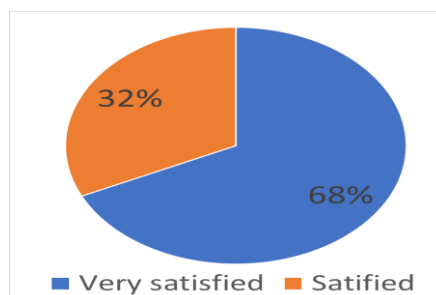


Figure 3. Satisfaction of students for the canteen

In the following section, several aspects regarding the conditions in the canteen are presented, such as: the dining area from a visual point of view (Figure 4); the presentation of the employees (Figure 5); menu visibility (Figure 6); the convenience of the dining area (Figure 7). The main conclusions of this are that the visual agreeability of the canteen is a somewhat divisive topic, as some respondents reported that they absolutely disagree with the idea that the dining area and the exterior look good. However, the vast majority of respondents harbor positive feelings towards the cafeteria's looks. Some less divisive subjects are regarding the cleanliness and presentability of the staff, which is overwhelmingly positive, the menu is regarded as well laid out. Another topic which sparked some division was regarding the convenience, ease of use and smart layout of the dining area, which just like the first variable is most described by a positive outlook.

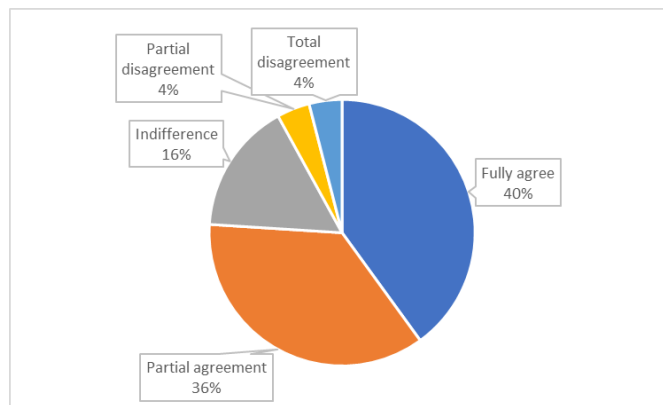


Figure 4. Visual agreeability of the canteen

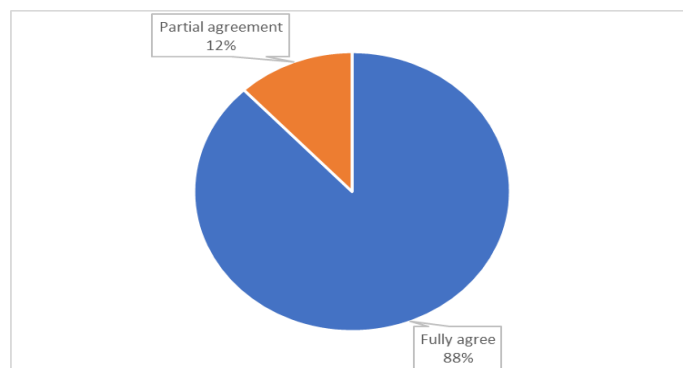


Figure 5. Cleanliness and presentation of staff

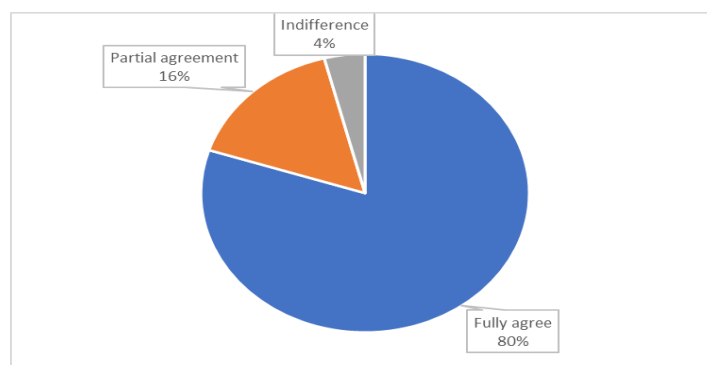


Figure 6. Clear and readable menu

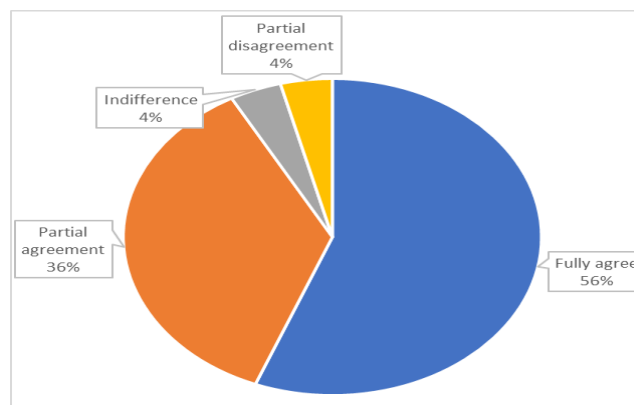


Figure 7. Convenience and easiness to use of dining area

Other variables assessed were the fast service, reliable services, knowledgeable staff, best interests of clients in mind and staff support by management, which were summarised in table 2. Of particular note is the fact that some respondents consider that the services of the canteen are not particularly fast, while all respondents reported that there were no mistakes made regarding their requirements.

Table 2.

Variables assessed in the study

Variable	Fully agree	Partial agree	Indifference	Partial disagreement	Total disagreement
Fast service	28	0	2	18	2
Reliable services	40	10	0	0	0
Knowledgeable staff	36	10	2	2	0
Best interest of clients in mind	34	14	2	0	0
Staff support by management	30	0	4	14	2

CONCLUSIONS

The university canteen is the main dining place for students, providing a diverse and affordable menu. The above data show the fact that it is well appreciated by students. The service dimension that diverges the most from the maximum value is responsiveness, as such we consider that this is one possible area where service quality can be perfected.

A possible improvement that could further help the university cafeteria would be to assess the expectations of the students eating there, in order to understand if their needs are being met successfully or if they have even higher expectations.

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