

RELATIONSHIP OF FOOD QUALITY AND FOOD PRICE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SATISFACTION IN UUM CAFETERIAS

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ABSTRACT

The food and beverage industry has been a prominent industry in the world. University food service has also become one of the services that need to be considered in order to gratify students by providing food in universities. University foodservice is one of the largest sectors of the food service industry and moreover, college student consumer group is getting larger. The main objective of this paper is to examine the relationship of food quality and food price on international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias. A mixed-method approach was applied in this study which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. In order to identify the current research problem, an initial pre-data collection was being done by distributing comment cards to the international students to gain feedback regarding their satisfaction towards food quality and food price while patronizing in UUM cafeterias. Based on the findings, majority of international students were dissatisfied with the taste, freshness, temperature, portion, and price. The second phase of this study, which is quantitative method, was conducted. Multiple regression analysis was done to examine the significant relationship between food quality and food price on international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias. Results revealed that taste, freshness, portion and price have significant relationship with international students' satisfaction. Meanwhile, temperature was not found to be significantly associated with international students' satisfaction. The results of this study are important to UUM management to improve cafeteria service in the future.

Keywords: food quality, food price, international students' satisfaction, cafeteria food

Introduction

In the history of mankind, populations moved in and out from one country to another country, within and between communities and across cultural lines (Danquah, Odjoji, Acquah, & Asiedu, 2010). Depending on the situations, the movement can be temporary, for instance, in the case of international students. According to Ruetzler and Taylor (2011), a major segment of university and college campus enrollments are international students. Malaysia government aims to target at least 200,000 international students to study locally in order to become the world's sixth-biggest education exporting country by 2020. Malaysia government effort in attracting international students to Malaysia education institution significantly contributes to the development of tourism industry and economic growth. According to the Education Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin; the increase in international students enrollment would be worth an estimated RM600 billion to the economy. Besides acquiring education, students' well being in term of food consumption is essential in students' daily life as food is an essential element which human beings depend on for their physiological need to survive.

Foodservice industry has been a leading industry in the world. This industry has become a well-known business among the human race. There had been a lot of developments and innovation implemented in the foodservice industry. Andaleeb and Caskey (2007) stated that university foodservice is also one of the largest sectors of the foodservice industry. University foodservice became significant aspect to influence the quality of campus life whilst providing strategic and competitive benefit in the higher education milieu (Horwitz, 2005; June, 2006). Developing a harmonious eating environment is necessary in university in order to satisfy students' satisfaction which they partially rely on the quality of universities' foodservices. According to Kathryn (2010) university cafeteria is a place where students spend approximately 5 hours a week. University foodservice operators should give importance on how to maintain food quality and food price to attract potential customers.

In the Malaysian context, the university foodservice management is facing crisis as students are dissatisfied with the food quality and food price provided by the university food operators (Abdullah, Mansor, & Naba, 2012). This is likely similar to study done by Xi and Shuai (2009) which indicated that food quality and food price are the important factors leading to students' dissatisfaction during patronizing the university cafeteria. Several researchers have examined on the service quality, food quality, food price, menu choices and customer

satisfaction of restaurant businesses (Meng & Elliot, 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010). Nevertheless, there are few studies that researchers have researched on food quality and food price at the university foodservice particularly on international students' context. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to contribution of each food quality attribute to international students' satisfaction.

To fill this research gap, the current study emphasized on food quality attributes and food price on international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias. More specifically, the objectives of the current study were (a) to examine the relationship between food quality attributes and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias and (b) to examine the relationship between food price and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias. It is important to study the impact of university's cafeteria services to ensure that UUM international students receive the greatest benefits from the cafeteria as part of their spending.

Literature review

International Student

A significant segment of university and college campus enrollments are international students (Ruetzler & Taylor, 2011). International students are defined as students crossing borders, country or territory of origin for the specific purpose of studying (Global Education, 2006). In other words, international students refer as "foreign students" who enrolled in an institution of education outside of the country. Temporary movement for example, in the case of international students might lead to changes in behaviors which are impacted by social environment, economic, cultural, physical and psychological (Woods, 1992; Lee, Sobal & Frongillo, 1999). Pan, Dixon, Himburg, Huffman (1999) noted that for international students, even a short term stay in a foreign country may influence undesirable changes in eating habits or food habits. The term eating habits is described as the quality of food, what is eaten, the ways food is prepared and the amount of food consumed (Noyongoyo, 2011). Talebloo and Baki (2013) indicated that international students had difficulty with food at university campuses and many of them find it difficult to find suitable food to consume. They stated that international students were not satisfied with the food quality and taste of Malaysian food. Thus, university foodservice becomes one of the services that need to be considered in order to satisfy international students by providing quality food in cafeterias. Therefore, maintaining food quality and food price in satisfying and attracting international students are amongst the main consideration of the cafeterias foodservice operators.

Food Quality

Quality plays a significant role in determining and influencing customer satisfaction. Food quality is defined as a "combination of attributes or characteristic of a product that have significance in determining the degree of acceptability of the product to a user" (Ferree, 1973 ;Ploeger& Angelika, 1996). According to McWilliams (2000) noted that food quality is the quality characteristics of food that is acceptable to customer. In several empirical studies, food quality attributes appeared to be the most significant predictor of customer satisfaction (Clark & Wood, 1998; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Peri, 2006, Sulek & Hensley, 2004). The attributes of food quality depend on the type of food and the individual's food preference. Past researches have discussed on various attributes of food quality which comprise taste, menu variety, presentation, hygiene, freshness, texture, temperature, halal, aroma, nutrition, portion, innovative menu items and authentic food. Since there are many attributes of quality mentioned in the past researchers, this study is focusing on taste, freshness, texture, portion and temperature. This study applied the quality attributes in a way it examine the relationship of taste, freshness, temperature and temperature on international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias.

Price

Price is a factor that plays an important role in affecting the distribution of new product or services in the market field. According to Foxall (1984), setting a price for new product in the market is difficult. Price is defined as the value which customer gain from an exchange (Levis & Shoemaker, 1997). Price has been considered as an important element in determining customer satisfaction (Qu, 1997). This is similar to research conducted by Ng (2005) and Xi and Shuai (2009) discovered price influence student satisfaction in dining hall services. Furthermore, Shoemaker (1998) found that students considered reasonable price an important variable when deciding where to eat. According to Monroe (1989) the price of the item on the menu also greatly influences customers because price has the capability of attracting them.

Customer Satisfaction

There is no doubt that plenty of research has been carried out on customer satisfaction and many researchers too, have studied the importance of customer satisfaction. Andaleeb and Conway (2006) in their study determined that, customer satisfaction is the heart of business marketing. Customer satisfaction is defined as customer's fulfillment response which customer judge on overall contentment level of utilization regarding to fulfillment provided from product or service (Oliver, 1997). According to Howard and Seth (1969) that customer satisfaction is described as the appropriateness of the remuneration received in exchange for the service experienced. Whilst customer satisfactions in foodservice are still being studied today, student satisfaction in university dining also is becoming more popular among researchers as students are among the big population in institutional foodservices especially in university dining (Ng, 2005; Xi & Shuai, 2009). Food quality and food price are seen as determinants of customer satisfaction while dining. The purpose of current study is to examine the relationship of food quality attributes and food price on international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias. Figure 1 illustrates the research framework for the study.

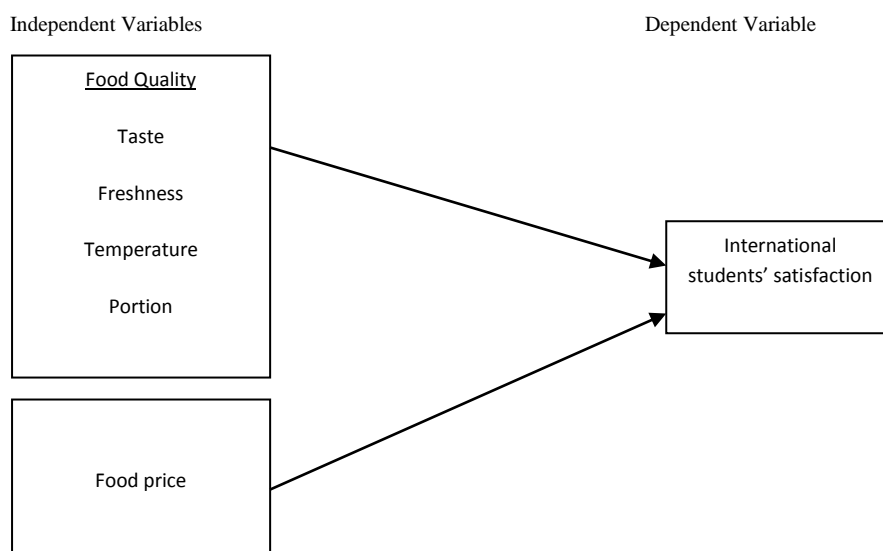


Figure 1: The research framework for the study

Research Hypotheses

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the current study examines the relationship of food quality attributes and food price on international students' satisfaction. The proposed conceptual framework involves independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables consist of taste, freshness, temperature, portion and food price while international student satisfaction is the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between taste and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeteria.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between freshness and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeteria

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between temperature and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeteria

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between portion and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeteria

Hypothesis 65: There is a significant relationship between food price and international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeteria

Methodology

A qualitative research was applied in exploring the research problem at hand. In order to identify the current research problem, the researcher had conducted an initial pre-data collection by distributing comment cards to the international students to gain feedback regarding their satisfaction towards food quality and food price while

patronizing in UUM cafeterias. From the interviews some significant themes emerged which includes taste, freshness, temperature, portion and food price. Measurement of variables generated from qualitative analysis examined via quantitative method. A quantitative method was adopted to examine the relationship of food quality and food price on international students' satisfaction in UUM cafeterias.

The population was 2095 students which consist of the total amount of international students in UUM, while the number of sample was about 325. The type of sampling that was used was convenience sampling. The type of instrument used in this research was a five point likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A included demographic factors while section B addresses independent variables (food quality and food price) and section C consists of dependent variable (customer satisfaction). The data collected through the questionnaire survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0. Two major analyses being used were descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis.

Findings

A. Demographic Data

Table 1: Respondent Profile

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	153	63
Female	90	37
Age		
>19	109	3.7
20-19	133	54.7
30-39	80	32.9
40-49	20	8.2
50-59	1	4.0
Religion		
Muslim	200	82.3
Non Muslim	43	17.7
Education		
Undergraduate	92	37.9
Postgraduate	151	62.1

In this study, 325 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to international students who patronage in UUM cafeterias during the month of January and February 2014. From the total of 325 sets of questionnaires distributed, 300 sets were returned. However, only 243 were completed while the other 57 incomplete sets were rejected. These unusable questionnaires were either completely returned back as blank or significant portion of such questionnaires was left blank. The high response rate for completed questionnaires was achieved with 75 percent from the total 325 out of 2095 UUM international students needed as the sample size in this research.

The total number of respondents who participated in this study was 243 students. The participants consisted of 63 % male (153 participants) and 37 % female (90 participants). Nine of the target participants were less than 19 years old (3.7%). Majority of the participants were between 20-29 years old, which had 133 participants (54.7%). 80 of them were between 30-39 years old (32.9%) followed by the participants with the range of age 40-49 with 20 participants (8.2%). Remaining one of the target participants age were 50 years and above (4%). Next, 82.3 percent (200 participants) were Muslims whereas 17.7 percent (43 participants) were Non- Muslim. Looking into the education level of the participants, 37.9 percent were undergraduate students (92 participants) and 62.1 percent were postgraduate students (151 participants).

B. Results of Multiple Regression

Table 2

Result of the Multiple Regression Analysis (International Students' Satisfaction as Dependent Variable)

Hypotheses	Variable	Beta	Std.	t-value	p-value	Findings
H1	Taste	0.298	0.058	5.102***	0.000	Supported
H2	Freshness	0.122	0.059	2.055**	0.041	Supported

H3	Temperature	-0.043	0.078	-0.551	0.582	Not Supported
H4	Portion	0.163	0.098	1.657*	0.099	Supported
H5	Fprice	-0.070	0.042	-1.664*	0.097	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. (two tailed test)

Hypothesis 1 was supported after multiple regression testing was conducted. From the results of significant value $p < 0.01$, this indicates that there is a significant relationship between taste and international students' satisfaction. A positive significant relationship was explained between taste and international students' satisfaction. The multiple regression analysis revealed that taste ranked as a top predictor in explaining international students' satisfaction with a Beta coefficient of 0.298 compared to other variables.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that there is a significant relationship between freshness and international students' satisfaction. According to Table 2, the result explains that freshness made a positive and significant relationship with international students' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.122$; $t = 2.055$; $p < 0.05$). Freshness was ranked as third top predictor in explaining international students' satisfaction with a Beta coefficient of 0.122 compared to other variables. Hence, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that there is a significant relationship between temperature and international students' satisfaction. Result of multiple regression test revealed temperature was not found to be significantly associated with international students' satisfaction ($\beta = -0.043$; $t = -0.551$; $p > 0.10$). Consequently, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that there is significant relationship between food portion and international students' satisfaction. An examination of results in Table 2 highlighted that food portion is significantly related with international students' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.163$; $t = 1.657$; $p < 0.10$). The multiple regression analysis revealed that portion ranked as second top predictor in explaining international students' satisfaction with a Beta coefficient of 0.163 compared to other variables. Hence, the result provides support the hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 suggested that there is a significant relationship between food price and international students' satisfaction. An examination of results in Table 2 indicated that food price is negatively and significantly related with international students' satisfaction ($\beta = -0.70$; $t = -1.664$; $p < 0.10$). The multiple regression analysis revealed that price ranked as fourth top predictor in explaining international students' satisfaction with a Beta coefficient of 0.078 compared to other variables. Therefore hypothesis 5 was supported.

Discussion

Taste

A positive significant relationship was explained between taste and international students' satisfaction. Therefore, when perception towards food taste is good, international students' satisfaction will also increase. So, it can be concluded that taste makes a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of international students' satisfaction. Based on previous researches, in customer satisfaction and taste, there is a significant relationship found between them. For example, the research conducted by Khan, Hussain and Yaqoob (2012) resulted taste having a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. These findings are consistent in part with those of Ryu and Han (2010), who examined that quality of food, which include taste is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction in the quick-casual dining sector.

Freshness

A positive significant relationship was explained between freshness and international students' satisfaction. Thus, it can be concluded that freshness makes a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of international students' satisfaction. The result had similar conclusion with finding of research by Sulek and Hensley (2004). Their analysis showed that quality of food, freshness, was one of the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction. Namkung and Jang (2007) mentioned that freshness is one of the food quality attributes among presentation healthy options, taste and temperature which lead to customer satisfaction. This is in line with the research by Shaharudin, Mansor and Elias (2011) whose findings showed that freshness appeared to be a significant predictor towards customer purchase intention.

Temperature

Multiple regression analysis revealed that temperature does not make a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of international students' satisfaction. The current result does not align with past research. Research conducted by Namkung and Jang (2007) revealed that temperature significantly influences customer satisfaction while dining in restaurant. This is in line with the research conducted by Sulaiman and Haron (2013) noted that temperature significantly associates with customer satisfaction in restaurant. This signifies that temperature is an important determinant of customer satisfaction and enhancing pleasure in foodservice restaurant industry. However this is not the case with the respondents in this study.

Portion

A positive significant relationship was explained between portion and international students' satisfaction. Therefore, when perception towards food portion is good, international students' satisfaction will also increase. So, it can be concluded that portion makes a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of international students' satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Jangga, Sahari and Basir (2012), claimed that studies have indicated that customer's level of satisfaction in restaurant and return patronage are determined by many variables and this includes portion of food. In the fast food restaurant industry a good portioning of food are one of the main contributors to customer satisfaction (Myung, McCool, & Feinstein (2008).

Price

A significant relationship was explained between price and international students' satisfaction. Based on past research, it is found that there is significant relationship between price and customer satisfaction. For example, research conducted by Andaleeb and Conway (2006), ranked price as the second most important element in influencing customer satisfaction. This is in line with research done by Khan, Hussain and Yaqoob (2013) that price is significantly related to customer satisfaction. Kim, Ng and Kim (2009) revealed price had a significant impact on overall customer satisfaction. Furthermore, research by Raman and Chinniah (2011) on student satisfaction in university cafeteria showed significant correlation between price and students' satisfaction.

Limitations and Conclusion

The current study does have some limitations, firstly this research is only limited to examine international student's satisfaction towards food quality attributes and food price in UUM cafeterias without taking consideration of other factors that might have been explained elsewhere for instance, service quality and quality of physical cafeteria environment. Those factors are not included in this study because as this study was carry out in university cafeterias which do not give priority in service quality and quality physical cafeteria environment as these factors are given importance in luxury restaurants. The assessing method of qualitative survey through comment cards was based on international students' perception and experience. In this study, it is more to what the international students perceived about the foods being served in UUM cafeterias. Participants answering the questions based on their memory may bias the results. Hence, it is important to note that this study includes international students who came from various cultural backgrounds. This impact their perception and expectation of food quality and food price in UUM cafeterias. Thus, the ability to generalize to the entire population of university students is limited.

Upon conducting this research, new findings were discovered. However, the main objectives of this research were achieved. The researcher managed to determine the relationship between qualities attributes of food and food price with international students' satisfaction. From the analysis conducted to examine the relationship, all four attributes had a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. However temperature revealed an unexpected result by not supporting the hypothesis 3. This result showed that temperature was not found significantly related with international students' satisfaction. Findings of this study clearly revealed food quality attributes (taste, freshness, and portion) and food price are the major determinant looked at by the international students while dining in UUM cafeterias. The results of this study are important to UUM management to improve cafeteria service in the future. In particular, guidelines on improving the food quality encompassing food taste, the freshness of food being served, food portions served, and food price are all important aspects which international students highlighted to affect their satisfaction towards cafeteria food in UUM.

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