

# THE DEGREE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN UNIVERSITY RESTAURANTS: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EVORA IN PORTUGAL

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## Abstract

Organizations in globalized and consumer societies are offering progressively more quality products in order to satisfy their customers. University restaurants are not indifferent to this phenomenon and also care about the degree of customer satisfaction. The present study was planned and developed in order to address this issue. The purpose of this investigation was to measure the degree of customer satisfaction in the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" of the University of Evora (Portugal), so as to improve services according to the needs and wishes of the regular users. In overall terms, it was found that the quality of service offered by this restaurant was satisfactory. However, further analysis showed that the most critical items were included in the variable "external environment", namely: "accessibility for the disabled" and "parking". Moreover, emerged as the most requested needs the following: "a more varied menu" and "an extension of opening hours". Given these results, we recommend the restaurant management to implement urgent measures to improve services, which may contribute not only to reduce the dissatisfaction of the regular customers but also to attract new ones.

Keywords: Quality, Customer Satisfaction, University Restaurant, Catering Services.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Published material on the theme "quality" is abundant and diverse, not emerging one definition or a consensual viewpoint. Garvin [1], for example, classifies the various settings in five main groups: *transcendental, based on the product, in manufacturing, on value and on user*. Authors like Paladini [2], Ghobadian, Speller and Jones [3] consider that all approaches may be summarized in one, as all them are related to the needs of the consumer: *based on the user (or customer)*. From Garvin definitions, Slack [4] has combined all approaches as follows: *quality is consistent with the expectations of consumers*.

The various studies denote an apparent trend towards the supremacy and importance of clients in the whole process of analysis and search for total quality. In fact, as stated in Green [5], customer satisfaction with a particular service can determine the soundness and reputation of an organization in demand of a service of excellence; that is why more and more organizations guide their policies to the needs and requirements of customers. In an attempt to retain those customers through its satisfaction, the positive feedback from the word-of-mouth, referred to by Appiah-Adu, Fyall and Singh [6], can arise.

The growing importance of quality to the organizations led to a radical change in the form of management. Lovelock and Wright [7] indicate factors such as time and speed in attendance, as key elements to consider for a customer's full satisfaction. In the case of the food sector, direct contact between the consumer and the service is immediate and explicit and can instantly set up a preference for the service (or not) [8].

## 2 DEGREE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE RESTORATION

Some studies have already been developed on the topic of customer satisfaction for restaurants in general. The study of Gibbert *et al.* [9] entitled *The deployment of a quality label in Toledo restaurants and Similar* aimed to verify the degree of customer satisfaction and to assess the importance of the restaurants' quality seal of those who participated in the group of restaurants of Toledo (Brazil). As a conclusion, it was noted that the acquisition of this seal was an important means to address the needs

and demands of customers, thereby contributing to greater competitiveness of companies in possession of it. The seal of quality is an important tool in the management of organizations to identify and to correct any flaws in the system.

In the study undertaken by Siebeneichler *et al.* [10] called *The customer satisfaction of restaurants: an evaluation of satisfaction and importance of attributes* the aim was to conduct an assessment of services provided by restaurants in the northwest region of the municipality of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) and the results showed that regarding the level of prioritization of satisfaction and importance of attributes the respondents replied in the following order: 1-cleaning, 2-location, 3-access, 4-quality meals, 5-staff appearance; and as to the level of importance: 1-cleaning, 2-menu, 3-attendance, 4-quality meals, 5-price.

As regards to satisfaction of customers university restaurants is worth mentioning the work of Caixeta and Cunha [11] named *Evaluation of University restaurant: a pilot study* that aimed to verify the level of customer satisfaction with the restaurant, starting from the constant complaints about the quality of food, service, queues, variety of food, nutritional aspect of food and price of the meal. In terms of results, overall rating was average (3.23, on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 was poor and 6 excellent).

Also noteworthy is the case study of Souza *et al.* [12] whose objective was to analyse the degree of satisfaction of clients of the university restaurant Campus III of the Federal University of Paraíba (Brazil). The method used for the collection of data was a questionnaire administered to students whose results showed a high degree of dissatisfaction. Another study applied in the same university restaurant, developed by Coutinho *et al.* [13], aimed to evaluate the quality management of services from the perspective of consumers and also a high degree of dissatisfaction was obtained. The authors considered that these results were endangering for success and reputation of the restaurant and suggested an urgent decision in order to eliminate or reduce the problems identified.

The present study was based on similar concerns and was focused on the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" of the University of Évora aiming to identify the needs of consumers as well as the aspects that are insufficient for customer total satisfaction.

### **3 PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this study was to evaluate the degree of satisfaction of clients of the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" of the University of Évora. For this work was prepared a survey questionnaires based on several aspects of the services provided by the restaurant, namely the variety and presentation of menus; quality, flavour and presentation of meals; prices; waiting time; staff service; cleaning and hygiene; and the environment, comfort and decoration (variables defined by Las Casas[14], Parasuraman *et al.* [15], Zeithaml *et al.* [16], Santos *et al.* [17], Oak *et al.* [18] and Zimmermann *et al.* [19]).

Apart from these, others served as a reference to the definition of the dimensions described, namely: Caixeta e Cunha [11] Coutinho *et al.* [13], Gibbert *et al.* [9], Souza *et al.* [12], Pinheiro *et al.* [20], Siebeneichler *et al.* [10]; [21] and Chang Jui-Kuei [22].

### **4 METHOD**

To delimit the universe under investigation were selected all customers who were at the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" of the University of Évora in 19, 21 and 22 of April 2010, during lunch.

The questionnaires were delivered personally and the purpose was properly explained as well as the importance of this instrument of analysis for the study. In those three days 99 questionnaires were distributed and 80 were returned, representing a response rate of 80.8%.

Table 1 shows the absolute and relative frequencies for the questionnaires distributed and collected.

**Table 1** – Questionnaires distributed and collected in the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" of the University of Évora

Questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires collected	Response rate
99	80	80,8%

The sample population object of this study was then the 99 clients who attended the restaurant when the questionnaires were applied. With respect to the characterization of population, it can be concluded that the difference in number between men and women was not very large (46.3% male and 48% female; 5% did not answer this question).

As for the age, 38% had between 19 and 28 years; 25% between 29 and 38; 15% between 39 and 48 years and 16% had more than 49 years (6% did not answer this question).

With regard to marital status, 45% were unmarried and 38% were married, of the remaining 17% did not respond and the others mentioned other situations.

With respect to qualifications, most had higher qualifications: 28% were graduate, 10% said they had master degree and 20% doctorate (18.8% did not answer).

The universe of restaurant customers during those days included 38% students, 30% teachers and 15% reported to be employees.

The data collection process was developed through the construction and application of a structured questionnaire, consisting of 67 items and a Likert scale format, aiming to obtain the degree of customer satisfaction regarding the quality of service provided. In table 2 are represented the variables of the questionnaire, the issues and the bibliographic sources.

**Table 2** - Variables and Studies used in the preparation of the questionnaire

Variables	Issues	Bibliographic Source
<b>Menu/ meals</b>	Timely disclosure of menus	Caixeta, J. E. e Cunha, L. F. [11] Las casas [14] Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> [15] Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> [16] Carvalho <i>et al.</i> [18] Santos <i>et al.</i> [17] Zimmermann <i>et al.</i> [19] Souza <i>et al.</i> [12] Siebeneichler <i>et al.</i> [10]
	Display of menus	
	Variety/diversity of items of the menu	
	Quality of food and beverages	
	Food flavour and aroma	
	Temperature of meals	
	Serving on plates (visual presentation)	
	Amount of food per serving	
<b>Price</b>	Value for money of meals	Las casas [14] Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> [15] Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> [16] Santos <i>et al.</i> [17] Zimmermann <i>et al.</i> [19] Siebeneichler <i>et al.</i> [10]
	Price/amount of food	
	Payment of meal	
<b>Waiting time</b>	Waiting time	Caixeta, J. E. e Cunha, L. F. [11] Carvalho <i>et al.</i> [18] Pinheiro <i>et al.</i> [20]
<b>Staff service</b>	Cordiality and friendliness of staff	Las casas [14] Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> [15] Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> [16] Carvalho <i>et al.</i> [18] Santos <i>et al.</i> [17] Zimmermann <i>et al.</i> [19]
	Speed of service provided by staff	
	Image of staff (uniform, hair and hands, personal hygiene)	
	Professionalism and competence of employees	
<b>Cleanliness and hygiene</b>	Cleaning of utensils (pans, cutlery, plates, cups)	Caixeta, J. E. e Cunha, L. F. [11]

	Cleanliness and hygiene of catering area (tables, chairs, floor, walls, etc.)	Las casas [14] Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> [15] Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> [16] Santos <i>et al.</i> [17] Zimmermann <i>et al.</i> [19] Siebeneichler <i>et al.</i> [10]
	Cleanliness and hygiene of WCs	
<b>Internal environment</b>	Organisation of spaces (arrangement of desks, space of movement, etc.)	Caixeta, J. E. e Cunha, L. F. [11] Las casas [14] Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> [15] Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> [16] Carvalho <i>et al.</i> [18] Santos <i>et al.</i> [17] Zimmermann <i>et al.</i> [19] Siebeneichler <i>et al.</i> [10]
	Relation number of clients/available space	
	Decoration and furniture	
	Air-conditioning and ventilation environment	
	Acoustic comfort (noise)	
	Lighting	
	General facilities comfort	
	Security (emergency exits, alarm systems, etc.)	
<b>External environment</b>	Opening hours	Caixeta, J. E. e Cunha, L. F. [11] Siebeneichler <i>et al.</i> [10] Jui Kuei [22]
	Location of Restaurant	
	Accessibility for people with special needs	
	Exterior facilities	

The quantitative analysis of the results was made through the evaluation of the variables under study, taking into account the scale 1 to 5, with the following ranges for closed items: [0-1[ – very dissatisfied; [1-2[ – unsatisfied; [2-3[ – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; [3-4[ – Satisfied; [4-5[– very satisfied (closed items). On the mixed items we used the "yes" or "no" answer and "why" and a qualitative analysis for open questions.

## 5 RESULTS

For variables under study in this research the degree of satisfaction was evaluated taking into account the replies obtained for each item of the questionnaire and compared the means obtained.

Table 3 presents averages for each of the variables and items covered in the questionnaire.

**Table 3 – Variables and averages of the respective items – Restaurant "Cuisine of Cardinal"**

Variables	Issues	Average
<b>Menu/ meals</b>	Timely disclosure of menus	4,05
	Display of menus	4,08
	Variety/diversity of items of the menu	3,68
	Quality of food and beverages	4,11
	Food flavour and aroma	4,12
	Temperature of meals	4,03
	Serving on plates (visual presentation)	4,35
	Amount of food per serving	3,62
<b>Price</b>	Value for money of meals	4,09
	Price/quantity of meals	3,86
	Payment of meal	4,30
<b>Waiting time</b>	Waiting time	3,68
<b>Staff service</b>	Cordiality and friendliness of staff	4,42

	Speed of service provided by staff	3,99
	Image of staff (uniform, hair and hands, personal hygiene)	4,43
	Professionalism and competence of employees	4,36
<b>Cleanliness and hygiene</b>	Cleaning of utensils (pans, cutlery, plates, cups)	4,40
	Cleanliness and hygiene of catering area (tables, chairs, floor, walls, etc.)	4,43
	Cleanliness and hygiene of WCs	4,08
<b>Internal environment</b>	Organisation of spaces (arrangement of desks, space of movement, etc.)	4,27
	Relation number of clients/available space	4,17
	Decoration and furniture	4,01
	Air-conditioning and ventilation environment	4,09
	Acoustic comfort (noise)	3,82
	Lighting of premises	4,00
	General facilities comfort	4,17
	Security (emergency exits, alarm systems, etc.)	3,69
<b>External environment</b>	Opening hours	3,82
	Location of Restaurant	4,21
	Accessibility for people with special needs	3,19
	Exterior facilities	3,53
	Parking	3,27
<b>Image</b>	General image of the restaurant	4,11
<b>Overall quality of service</b>	Quality of service provided in general terms	4,07

The table shows the result of averages obtained and which items generated more or less satisfaction in the respective variables. All items studied obtained a rating of "satisfied" or "very satisfied". The item "accessibility for people with special needs" presents the lowest satisfaction rate (3.19) and "cleanliness and hygiene of catering area (tables, chairs, floor, walls, etc.)" and "image of staff (uniform, hair and hands, personal hygiene)" the highest values (4.43 each).

Analysing now each of the variables *per se*, we can affirm the following:

- In the attribute **Menu/Meals**, the most critical item was the "amount of food per serving" with an average of 3.62, followed by "a variety/diversity of items of the menu", with an average of 3.68. Although these two items have a lower average, the evaluation is not negative as the level of satisfaction is reasonable. The item that had a very satisfactory assessment was the "serving on plates" (visual presentation), with an average of 4.35.
- In **Price** variable, the "Price/Quantity of meals" is an indicator of satisfaction with an average of 3.86, while the "payment of meals" had better evaluation (4.30).
- In respect to the variable **Waiting Time**, the index of satisfaction had an average of 3.68.
- Regards **Staff Service**, the "speed of service" generated the lowest level of satisfaction (3.99), nevertheless close to the answer "very satisfied". On the other hand, the items better assessed were "Image of staff" with 4.43, followed by "cordiality and friendliness of staff" with an average of 4.42.
- In the variable **Cleanliness and Hygiene**, the item that had a lower average (4.08) was "cleaning and hygiene of WCs". On the other hand, the item "cleanliness and hygiene of catering area (tables, chairs, floor, walls, etc.)" had the highest average value (4.43). However both attained a high level of satisfaction.
- The level of **Internal Environment**, the factor that less pleased the participants was "security (emergency exits, etc.)" averaging only 3.69 (satisfactory) and the factor that generated greater

concordance was "organisation of spaces (arrangement of tables, space, movement, etc.)" with 4.27 (very satisfactory).

- For the **External Environment**, this variable had the lowest value of satisfaction (3.19) on the item that tested the "accessibility for people with special needs." In the same variable, the item "location of the restaurant" gained an average of 4.21 (very satisfactory).

- To "the general quality of the restaurant" and "image", these were considered very satisfactory, with an average of 4.5 and 6, respectively.

When asked about the frequency of use of the restaurant only 16% of the customers were attending for the first time and 81% have been there before.

The respondents indicated that the frequency with which customers frequented the restaurant was as follows: 36% - 1 year or less and 12 99% - since opening; 14.29% - daily; 10.39% of the customers had no right day to attend the restaurant and 6.49% all Mondays and Wednesdays.

As to the intention of customers to return to the restaurant 91% said "yes" and only 5% did not express this desire. The most mentioned reasons for each of these intentions were respectively: the good relation between the factors quality/price/location and not visiting the University regularly.

Most customers would recommend/advise the restaurant to other people (90%) and only 3% would not, being the difference quantity/quality the only aspect generator of dissatisfaction, which contrasts sharply with the good price/quality ratio and the high level of customer satisfaction.

On the next question we asked respondents to indicate the reason for choosing this restaurant with variables defined by Las Casas [14], Parasuraman *et al.* [15], Zeithaml *et al.* [16], Saints *et al.* [17], Carvalho *et al.* [18], Zimmermann *et al.* [19], Caixeta e Cunha [11] Coutinho *et al.* [13], Gibbert *et al.* [9], Souza *et al.* [12], Pinheiro *et al.* [20], Siebeneichler *et al.* [10], [21] and Chang Jui-Kuei [22], such as: the menu, quality of meals, quality of service, price, comfort, cleanliness and hygiene, location, parking, among others.

These reasons were evaluated on a scale of "yes" or "no", according to their agreement with the reasons. The results of the classification, in percentages, depending on the response of respondents are:

- **Price** variable obtained the greater concordance, with 77%-
- **Location** emerged with 75% of concordant answers and **Comfort** 74%.
- **Quality of meals** and **Cleanliness and Hygiene** were evaluated in the same proportion with 70% of responses for each variable.
- The **Menu** and the **Quality of Service** also obtained the same proportion with 66% of answers indicating these as the main reasons for choosing the restaurant.
- With an average evaluation we have **Parking**, where the response rate of "no" was 48%.
- Finally 10.4% of respondents pointed out other non specified reasons.

The preferred menu was clearly the menu of the day (98.36%). This choice is due to the fact that the meal is already prepared and save time for clients.

The food consumption indicated by the participants, according to the various options available on the menu was: soup, meat, fish dish, salads, quiches, mini-meals, tourist menu, desserts, and so on. They had to mark "yes" or "no" as the usual consumption. According to the answers of respondents, table 4 presents the ratio of food identified as the most consumed.

**Table 4 – Food identified as the most consumed**

<b>Food consumed</b>	<b>Answers "Yes"</b>
Meat	83,1%
Soup	70,1%
Fish	57,1%
Desserts	50,6%
Mini Meals	39,0%
Salads	33,8%
Quiches	15,6%
Others	3,9%
Tourist menu	1,3%

Respondents were also asked, using the scale "yes" or "no", for their opinion on the need of introducing (or not) the following services:

- Continuous monitoring of nutritionists to preparation of menus;
- Adaptation of the menus on the seasons;
- Music environment;
- Internet connection.

The response rate to these questions identified two services that have received a positive response: "adaptation of the menus on the seasons" (77.9%) and "continuous monitoring of nutritionists to preparation of menus" (55.8%).

The other two issues had divergent results. The use of music obtained 44.2% "yes" and 44.2% "no". Regarding the need for a space with connection to the Internet, 63.6% answered "no" (only 23.4% said "yes").

There were two open-ended questions. The first requested a brief indication of what was missing the restaurant to have a degree of satisfaction of "Very Satisfied" from the customer. The second question was intended to obtain feedback/suggestions.

The vast majority of respondents ignored the first question (80.5% did not answer). However, this led to several proposals for improving expectations and user satisfaction. The first and most requested was to improve the "variety of the menu" (5.2%), the following with the same percentage (2.6%) were a "extended hours", "faster service", "better parking" and "improving the external appearance". Then more three proposals arose, also with the same percentage (1.3): "promoting cultural initiatives", "more employees" and "lower the price of wine". The comments and suggestions had similarly high non-response rate (89.6%) and six items divided by two equal proportions of answers: "greater variety of à la carte" and "reduce cream", with 2.6%, four items with 1.3% each: "more authentic cuisine", "wider opening hours in the Summer", "greater disclosure" and "use of music".

## **6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The results of this empirical study showed that, contrary to the studies of Pinheiro *et al.* [20] and Souza *et al.* [12], in which the results showed a high degree of dissatisfaction, in this case all variables concerning the quality of the services of the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" received a satisfactory or very satisfactory evaluation, considering that most customer responses obtained an average of 3 or more (satisfied).

In percentages, the restaurant "Cozinha do Cardeal" presented a good level of performance, since customers assumed the quality of services provided as satisfactory (75%) or very satisfactory (15.79%) in general.

As in the study of Gibbert *et al.* [9], where the variables proposed for evaluation were the location, environment, cleanliness and hygiene, waiting time, attendance, menu and quality of the meals and obtained 66% of responses at level 4 to the overall quality of restaurant, in this study this item obtained an average of 4.11 (very satisfied).

In the study of Siebeneichler *et al.* [10], respondents gave less weight to the price and revealed to have a greater level of satisfaction regarding the cleanliness and location of the restaurant. In this study, these variables (price, location and comfort) achieved very satisfactory values.

As the study elaborated by Jui-Kuei [22], parking item received some displeasure. Some other items showed a less positive assessment by virtue of the gap between the features of the service that customers received and those they wish to receive, namely: "accessibility for people with special needs" (3.19); "external appearance" (3.53); "amount of food per serving" (3.62); "Variety/diversity of the menu" (3.62); "waiting time" (3.68); "security (emergency exits, alarm systems, etc.)" (3.69).

This way, and according to the studies of Chang [21], we suggest the urgent improvement measures proposed by the customers in open questions, which are in short the need to improve accessibility for people with special needs and the appearance as well as to increase the variety of the menu and the amount of food served.

The information obtained in this study is therefore a basis for the management to improve the quality of service and to achieve excellence in the pursuit of continuous improvement as Coutinho *et al.* [13] say: "less satisfactory results are compromising the success and reputation of the restaurant".

## 7 SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIO-ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

As mentioned earlier, it is advisable to implement some measures for improvement in some points that have lower levels of satisfaction. In this context we suggest the following:

- **Accessibility for people with special needs** – we propose the creation of access for the disabled.
- **External appearance of the premises** – we suggested an improvement of the image of the building through cleaning and painting the walls of the building, as well as the inclusion of ornamental plants outside the restaurant.
- **Menu Variety and quantity of the dose** – we recommend revision of the quantity and variety of the menu.
- **Waiting time for care** – we advise to hire a greater number of employees at least during peak hours.
- **Security (emergency exits, alarm systems, etc.)** – we suggest a review of emergency and security plans.

Is also recommended to take into consideration the matters referred by clients, namely: more and better parking lots reserved for customers of the restaurant; extension of the period of opening hours of the restaurant, including dinners; adaptation of menus on seasons; continuous monitoring of nutritionists to preparation of menus; use of music, and the creation of an area with Internet connection.

On the other hand, it is important not neglecting all the aspects that had the highest levels of satisfaction in the study and that were evidenced by respondents, such as: "image of staff (uniform, hair and hands, toiletries)"; "cleanliness and hygiene of catering area (tables, chairs, floor, walls, etc.)"; "cordiality and friendliness of employees"; and "meals on plates (visual presentation)".

We can say that this organization has already met important conditions that contribute to the quality of service and the aspects that show less satisfaction are related to factors that, apart from the issue of parking, are easily changeable.

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