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Abstract

This study investigates students' perceived satisfaction with cafeteria services at Redeemer's University, aiming to identify key factors influencing their dining experiences and overall contentment. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from a stratified sample of undergraduate students through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The study examined dimensions such as food quality, variety, pricing, hygiene, service efficiency, and ambiance. Results revealed that while students generally appreciated the affordability and convenience of the cafeteria, significant concerns were raised regarding food quality and menu diversity. Cleanliness and customer service emerged as strong predictors of satisfaction. Gender and academic level were found to moderately influence satisfaction levels. The study concludes that improving food quality, expanding menu options, and enhancing service delivery would significantly boost students' satisfaction. Recommendations are offered to university management for policy reforms aimed at optimizing cafeteria operations to better meet students' expectations and nutritional needs.

Introduction

There is a growing trend of college students utilising campus foodservice outlets as part of their captive market, making university foodservice one of the most significant areas of the foodservice business worldwide (Garg, 2014). Many buildings and institutions provide cafeteria services, including hospitals, nursing homes, schools, prisons, and university campuses. Customers place a high value on meal service quality as an indicator of overall quality. University cafeterias are vital in moulding the whole student experience, impacting their nutritional intake, academic achievement, social connections, and general well-being (Sogari et al., 2018). Cafeteria services are required to satisfy the many demands of students, including dietary requirements, cultural concerns, and cost, as they are essential parts of campus life (Almohaimmed, 2019).

Nevertheless, despite their significance, university cafeterias sometimes come under fire for problems including a small menu selection, subpar food, and insufficient service, which greatly influence students' satisfaction (Abdullah et al., 2020). Several variables, such as food quality, cost, cleanliness, employee conduct, and the availability of healthy alternatives, affect how satisfied students are with university cafeteria services (Nadzirah et al., 2019). Higher retention rates, increased campus involvement, and better student morale are associated with satisfactory

cafeteria services (Kim et al., 2020). On the other hand, discontent might result in detrimental effects, including worse academic achievement and a greater dependence on off-campus food alternatives, which might not always meet students' dietary requirements (Ali & Frew, 2018).

In order to improve the campus experience for everyone, university managers must understand what factors contribute to students' satisfaction with cafeteria services. According to Yusof et al. (2019), prior research has shown that service improvement programs benefit greatly from student input. Cafeterias face a tricky balancing act between meeting long-standing customer expectations and adapting to new trends while focusing on sustainability and offering healthier menu alternatives (Sulaiman et al., 2021). Intending to find ways to make things better, this research intends to investigate what makes university cafeteria services so suitable for students. University administrators may benefit from this study since it investigates the relationship between environmental conditions, service efficiency, and food quality. In addition, the research will add to the existing body of knowledge on student happiness and campus services by providing a more nuanced picture of how the cafeteria might adapt to students' changing demands.

For a clearer understanding of students' satisfaction with cafeteria services, the following objectives were studied:

- i. Determined students' perception of food quality
- ii. examined the price and value fairness of food and service in the cafeteria
- iii. assessed the attitude of staff towards the students
- iv. examined the relationship between the cafeteria's physical environment and students' comfort

Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between food quality and customer patronage

H02: Service quality does not influence students' repurchase of food at the Redeemer's University Cafeteria

H03: Price and value fairness has no significant effect on students' intention to repurchase food at the Redeemer's University Cafeteria

H04: Good physical environment does not significantly influence patronage

Literature Review

Maslow proposed a hierarchy of requirements for humans, with physiological demands at the base and more fundamental ones further up the hierarchy (Maslow, 1953). The demand for nourishment is one of the physiological necessities. According to Hamburg, Finkenauer, and Schuengel (2014), providing food in areas where there are humans to meet their fundamental requirements is essential. Food is considered the most motivating factor for visits to some destinations (Boluwaji et al., 2023). Consequently, businesses should supply their employees with cafeterias or food courts to meet their nutritional needs. Colleges and universities are like any other institution that houses people. Having a cafeteria is as simple as an organisation realising that meeting the nutritional needs of its employees would lead to increased efficiency and less waste. One of life's most fundamental needs is access to nutritious food, and cafeterias provide just that (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

The relationship between student happiness, health, and academic success as measured by their level of satisfaction with university cafeteria services is a key topic in higher education research (Sogari et al., 2018). Quality of food and service, affordability, cleanliness, variety of healthy alternatives, and availability are some of the main elements that affect student satisfaction

(Abdullah et al., 2020; Nadzirah et al., 2019). These aspects play a significant role in moulding students' views and encounters with university cafeterias, which serve as gathering spots for more than just food (Kim et al., 2020).

These dimensions are often measured in research all over the globe using frameworks like SERVQUAL and derivative methodologies like DINESERV (e.g., Hung, 2010; Akter et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2014). Consistent motifs have been identified via extensive investigation in a variety of circumstances. Many studies have shown that food quality, including features like flavour, freshness, and cleanliness standards, is the most important factor predicting satisfaction in university cafeterias (Okursoy & Turan, 2014; Akter et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2014; Nasiruddin & Ghani, 2014; Afroza & Haque, 2022). However, when there is a disparity between the price and the value, customers are dissatisfied, affecting how fair the pricing is. Students were found to be willing to pay more for meals provided the quality and quantity were sufficient (Akter et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2014; Afroza & Haque, 2022). In contexts where cultural norms of customer connection are influential, the attitude of the staff, which includes friendliness, warmth, and efficiency, is another crucial component (Osman et al., 2018; Afroza & Haque, 2022). Even while these studies fill in some important gaps, questions about cultural and location-specific variables still need to be answered. Studies conducted in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Tanzania have focused on cultural preferences (Akter et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2018; Afroza & Haque, 2022; Msendo, 2024). However, these studies have not addressed the unique dynamics of Nigerian universities, where factors such as traditional dietary preferences, affordability concerns, and private university contexts may significantly impact satisfaction dimensions, which this study emphasises in private universities in Nigeria.

Food Quality

Food quality is among the most important factors determining student satisfaction (Ali & Frew, 2018). According to research, students place a premium on flavour, freshness, and nutritional content when assessing cafeteria services (Sulaiman et al., 2021). Meeting the nutritional requirements of a multicultural student body is becoming increasingly dependent on providing

different menu alternatives, such as vegetarian, vegan, and culturally appropriate meals (Almohaimmeed, 2019). However, according to Yusof et al. (2019), students who experience poor food quality are more likely to be dissatisfied and choose dining options outside campus.

Service Quality

Aside from staff conduct, efficiency, and responsiveness, service quality is another important component that affects student satisfaction (Nadzirah et al., 2019). A pleasant eating experience is enhanced when the personnel are kind and attentive, the service is rapid, and student issues are addressed immediately (Abdullah et al., 2020). Conversely, discontent might result from lengthy wait times, unprofessional personnel, and insufficient methods for resolving complaints (Kim et al., 2020).

Pricing and Affordability

Students worry a lot about money since many have restricted budgets (Sogari et al., 2018). Students are happier when cafeteria pricing is fair and represents the value of the food and serving sizes (Ali & Frew, 2018). When students see that the cafeteria costs are too high, especially for healthier selections, they may buy less healthy food elsewhere (Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Cleanliness and Ambience

According to Yusof et al. (2019), students' happiness is greatly influenced by the physical environment of university cafeterias. This includes factors like cleanliness, seating arrangements, and general mood. An eating space that is clean and well-maintained improves the whole experience, but overcrowding and poor hygiene might have the opposite effect (Almohaimmeed, 2019).

Sustainability in Health

Students increasingly seek sustainable and healthful food alternatives as their knowledge of these issues rises (Sogari et al., 2018). In order to fulfil student expectations and increase satisfaction, universities should consider adding locally produced, organic, and sustainable food alternatives to their cafeteria menus (Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) and the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model. These theories offer a solid groundwork for

investigating what makes university cafeteria services satisfying for students.

Quality of Service (SERVQUAL) Framework

The five aspects of service quality identified by Parasuraman et al. (1988) in their SERVQUAL model are tangibles, responsibility, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In the setting of college dining halls, Things like cleanliness, seating arrangements, and how food is presented are examples of tangibles. Consistently high-quality food and service are hallmarks of reliability. How quickly staff members respond to student demands and concerns is a measure of responsiveness. Students' faith in the cafeteria's capacity to serve healthy, well-balanced meals is related to the concept of assurance. The staff's ability to empathise with pupils reflects how well they know and can meet their needs.

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT)

According to the ECT (Oliver, 1980), the level of satisfaction is dictated by how well a service fulfils or surpasses expectations. The degree to which students' expectations (for example, regarding food quality, price, and service) are met determines the level of pleasure they report when dining at university cafeterias. The likelihood of student satisfaction with the cafeteria services is high if they meet or surpass expectations.

Theoretical Integration

Students' happiness with the cafeteria services at their institution is, according to this study, which combines the SERVQUAL model with ECT, a function of how well the service meets their expectations and how well their perceptions of the service are matched. According to the model, if services are better matched with what students anticipate, they can increase student happiness. This includes food quality, service efficiency, price, cleanliness, and health-conscious offers.

Empirical review

A conceptual model was developed by Mathur and Gupta (2019) to show how diners' perceptions of value, feelings while they are eating, and intentions to return are influenced by the dining environment and food quality at fast-casual restaurants. The study examined the relationships between dining ambience, food quality, perceived value, satisfying emotional experiences while consuming, and intentions to return. The study collected data from three fast-casual eateries in a heavily populated urban region in northern India. Guests at these

restaurants were given a self-administered questionnaire to fill out in order to record their impressions, feelings, and behavioural intentions. Factor analysis and the structural equation model (SEM) approach were used to analyse the gathered data. The study found a significant link between patrons' opinions on the restaurant's ambience and the meal's calibre.

Kim and Bachman (2019) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the influence of restroom cleanliness on restaurant patrons. The target population encompassed casual table restaurant customers in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The research data were gathered through a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of patrons across three distinct casual table restaurants. The selection of these restaurants aimed to ensure a representative spectrum regarding restaurant categories, dimensions, and geographic distribution within Vancouver. The study's findings unveiled that the foremost determinant of cleanliness was the visual appeal of the restroom, closely followed by the presence of personal hygiene items. Moreover, Restroom-Related Comfort (RRC) significantly impacted customer satisfaction.

In exploring how perceptions of service quality shape customer satisfaction, Ramli (2023) surveyed consumers of two distinct catering services in the Kuala Lumpur region. The data for this study were gathered by implementing a SERVQUAL questionnaire. From a total of 100 valid survey responses, the analysis

encompassed a regression analysis. The analysis indicated that neither of the two catering services significantly impacted service quality and customer satisfaction. However, the overall mean score indicated that Caterer A was perceived as offering superior service quality compared to Caterer B. These findings underscore that customers possess the autonomy to exercise their preferences and make informed choices in pursuit of their needs.

Methodology

The primary data used for this research work was obtained through a research survey technique in which 371 copies of the questionnaire were personally administered to the target respondents who were randomly selected. A total of three hundred and sixty-nine copies were retrieved. The respondents comprised 100-500 level students in various colleges and departments. The students of Redeemer's University were the targeted population of the study. The total population of the students was obtained to determine the sample size for this study. The student population at the time of this research was five thousand, one hundred and fifty-seven (5,157), and the representative samples were generated using Yamane's Formula. Redeemers University cafeteria (Manna Palace) was the first organised food vendor, which started operation in 2015. The cafeteria is patronised by students, lecturers and other visitors to the campus, such as parents, construction workers, engineers, and many more.

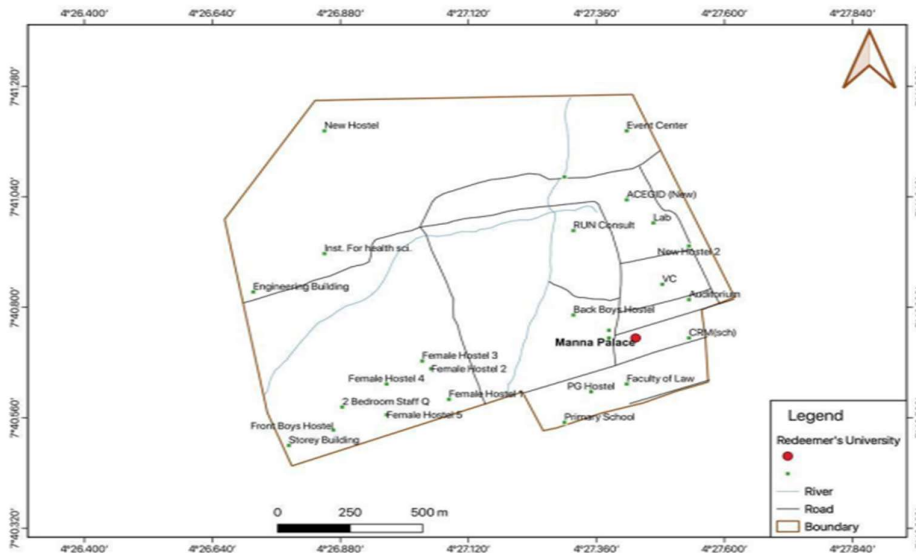


Figure 1: Redeemer's University Map showing Manna Palace Cafeteria
Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Results and Discussions

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The table shows 219 male students (59.3%) and 150 female students (40.7%) in the sample. Most students are between 22 and 27 years old (70.2%), followed by those 16 to 21 (27.4%). Only nine students (2.4%) are 28 years old or above. Most students are at the 300 level (47.4%), followed by those at the 200 level

(28.5%). There are fewer students in the 100 level (7.6%), 400 level (13.0%), and 500 level (3.5%). The faculty distribution shows that 22.2% were in Social Sciences, 14.9% were in Management Sciences, 35.8% were in the Faculty of Humanity, 12.5% were from Faculty of Law, 7.0% were in the Natural Sciences, 4.3% were in Engineering, while 3.3% were from the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of students

Variables	Options	Frequency	%
Sex	Male	219	59.3
	Female	150	40.7
	Total	369	100.0
Age	16 years - 21 years	101	27.4
	22 years - 27 years	259	70.2
	28 years and above	9	2.4
	Total	369	100.0
Level	100 Level	28	7.6
	200 Level	105	28.5
	300 Level	175	47.4
	400 Level	48	13.0
	500 Level	13	3.5
	Total	369	100.0
Faculty	Social Science	82	22.2
	Management Science	55	14.9
	Humanities	132	35.8
	Law	46	12.5
	Natural Science	26	7.0
	Engineering	16	4.3
	Basic Medical Science	12	3.3
	Total	369	100.0

Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Table 2 shows that 65.6% of the respondents affirmed that the quality of food provided in Manna Palace was satisfactory, while 34.4% were unsatisfied. On price and value fairness, it was noted that a 70.2% satisfactory level was attained, while 29.8% dissatisfaction was obtained. Evaluating staff and service quality satisfaction indicated that 69.1% were satisfied, while 30.9% were dissatisfied. The findings on

the physical environment of Manna Palace revealed a 66.4% satisfaction rate and 33.6% dissatisfaction with the physical environment. Lastly, the level of customers' patronage was noted, with a 61.8% level of satisfaction and 38.2% dissatisfaction with customers' patronage. The findings revealed an average level of satisfaction with the various aspects of the cafeteria.

Table 2: Students' satisfaction with the cafeteria services

Cafeteria Services	Mean	SD	Students' Perception			
Food Quality	22.21	3.92	F	242	127	369
			%	65.6	34.4	100.0
Price and Value Fairness	14.99	3.06	F	259	110	369
			%	70.2	29.8	100.0
Staff Attitude	18.73	3.69	F	255	114	369
			%	69.1	30.9	100.0
Physical Environment	13.62	3.13	F	245	124	369
			%	66.4	33.6	100.0
Customers' Patronage	18.87	2.58	F	228	141	369
			%	61.8	38.2	100.0

Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: No significant relationship exists between food quality and customers' patronage in the Manna Palace cafeteria.

The result in Table 3 revealed that there was a significant relationship between food quality and

customers' patronage [$r(367) = .57, p < .01$]. This implied that undergraduates' patronage of the cafeteria increased with a significant increase in their perception of food quality. This negates hypothesis 1, and it was rejected.

Table 3: Quality of Food and Customers' Patronage

Variables	Mean	SD	N	df	r	p
Perceived Food Quality	22.21	3.92	369	367	.57	< .01
Customers' Patronage	18.87	2.58	369			

Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between price and value fairness and customers' patronage in the Manna Palace cafeteria.

The result in Table 4 revealed that there was a significant relationship between price and value fairness and customers' patronage [$r(367) = .54,$

$p < .01$]. This implied that undergraduates' patronage of the cafeteria increased significantly with a significant increase in price and value fairness. This negates tested hypothesis 2, and it was rejected.

Table 4: Price and Value Fairness and Customers' Patronage

Variables	Mean	SD	N	df	r	p
Price and Value Fairness	14.99	3.06	369	367	.54	< .01
Customers' Patronage	18.87	2.58	369			

Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Hypothesis 3: Service quality will not significantly influence students' repurchase intention in the Manna Palace cafeteria.

The regression analysis indicated that service quality significantly predicted repurchase intention among students ($\beta = .53, t = 12.00, p < .01$). This means that undergraduate repurchase

intention increases with an increase in their positive perception of the service quality rendered at the cafeteria. The observed variance attributed to this was 28%. The result negates the formulated hypothesis 3. Thus, it was rejected.

Table 5: Service Quality Predicting Customers' Patronage

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R ²	df	F
				.53	28	1,367	144.03**
Service Quality	.53	12.00	< .01				

** $p < 0.01, N = 369$

Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Hypothesis 4: Physical environment has no significant influence on students' intention to repurchase food at Manna Palace cafeteria.

The regression analysis in Table 6 indicated that physical environment significantly influenced repurchase intention among students ($\beta=.51$, $t=11.37$, $p < .01$). This means that

undergraduate repurchase intention increases with an increase in their positive perception of the physical environment at the cafeteria. The observed variance attributed to this was 26%. The result negates the formulated hypothesis 4. Thus, it was rejected.

Table 6: Physical Environment Predicting Customers' Patronage

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R ²	df	F
				.51	.26	1, 367	129.32**
Physical Environment	.51	11.37	< .01				

** $p < 0.01$, $N=369$

Source: Authors' field survey 2023.

Discussions

The results of the students' socio-demographic characteristics are in tandem with the findings of some scholars. Adeoti et al. (2023) found that the gender distribution of students at Nigerian universities is similar to that of the general population, with a slight majority of males. On the students' age distribution, a study by Ajala et al. (2022) found that the average age of students at Nigerian universities is 22 years old. Ogundele et al. (2021) found that the majority of students at Nigerian universities are in the 300 level. Ojo et al. (2020) affirmed that the most popular faculty at Nigerian universities is Social Sciences.

The findings of this study are in line with the works of a study conducted by Yu, Luo and Zhu (2018), who studied the effect of quality attributes on visiting consumers' patronage intentions of green restaurants in China and found that food quality has a positive and significant effect on consumers' patronage while the food quality is determined by food presentation, variety and freshness. Also, studies such as Abdullah, et al. (2018), Mathur & Gupta (2019), Zhu (2022), Nwokah & Adiele (2018), Njite et al., (2015), and Anyasor & Njelita (2020) all show that food quality is a major driver of customers' patronage at food cafeterias and restaurants. Hence, food service quality significantly influences students' patronage of the Manna Palace cafeteria at Redeemer's University.

The results of this study indicated that price and value fairness positively and significantly influence customers' patronage. The results are in conjunction with the study of Anyasor et al. (2020), who examined customer loyalty and patronage of quick-service restaurants in Nigeria.

The results showed a significant positive relationship between price fairness, customer loyalty, and patronage of quick service restaurants in Anambra State, Nigeria. In the works of Garg & Kumar (2017), Severt, Shin and Chen (2022), and Ahmed et al., (2023), it was concluded that price and value fairness both have a direct and significant effect on consumer satisfaction in various restaurants across the world.

Also, the study's regression analysis indicated that service quality significantly predicted repurchase intention among students of Redeemer's University. This supports the findings of Mensah & Mensah (2018), who studied the effects of service quality and customer satisfaction on repurchase intention in restaurants on the University of Cape Coast campus. In their study, service quality was found to affect repurchase intention significantly. These findings also agree with the findings from various studies such as Hidayat, Bismo and Basri (2020), Doeim et al., (2022), Arlanda & Suroso (2018), Seo & Lee (2021), and Amoako et al., (2023).

Lastly, the study findings showed that the physical environment positively and significantly affects students' intention to repurchase food at the Manna Palace cafeteria of Redeemer's University. Studies relating to this finding can be seen in the work of Han & Hyun (2017), who examined the impact of hotel-restaurant image and quality of the physical environment, service, and food on satisfaction and intention in Korea. Their results show that the physical environment is significantly associated with consumers' satisfaction and intention to repurchase the restaurant's products. This is also in line with the findings in the works of Fungai (2017), Hanaysha

(2016), Mensah and Mensah. (2018), Xiao, Yang and Iqbal (2018), and Seo and Lee (2021). These findings conclude that Cross-functional training programmes need assessment to positively and significantly affect employee motivation.

Conclusion

This research study assessed students' perceptions of cafeteria services and patronage at Manna Palace Cafeteria, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State. The study investigated several key factors influencing students' patronage behaviours and intentions. The research findings indicate that a significant portion of the student population is satisfied with the cafeteria services, particularly regarding food quality and cleanliness. However, some areas require improvement, such as menu variety and pricing. Students expressed a desire for more

diverse meal options and affordable meal plans. Additionally, enhancing the overall ambience and addressing long waiting times during peak hours emerged as key areas for improvement.

Conclusively, this research work effectively investigated the factors influencing students' perception of cafeteria services and their subsequent patronage behaviours at the Manna Palace Cafeteria at Redeemer's University. The study's findings collectively underline the critical importance of food service quality, price and value fairness, service quality, and the physical environment in shaping students' patronage intentions. The insights gained from this study can serve as a valuable guide for cafeteria management in making informed decisions to enhance the overall dining experience and foster greater student loyalty.

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