

Food Service Quality Survey at the University of Zimbabwe Private Canteens

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Abstract: A quality survey was conducted at private food outlets at the University of Zimbabwe from June 2007 to October 2011. The objective of the study was to assess services offered in relation to customers' expectations. The other objectives were to assess the reason for many food service providers on campus and weigh the advantages and limitations of such a system. Data collection was effected through observation and questionnaire interviews. Rice with chicken, rice and sadza with beef and beverages were chosen relative to other foods by customers who bought food from Supermarket canteen A. Sadza is a thickened porridge prepared by heating a mixture of pulverized grains and water. The common form of sadza is made from white maize meal. Customers who bought food from Canteen B preferred sadza with beef stew and sadza with chicken stew to other meals. Egg rolls and polony rolls were preferred to beef burgers and smoked sausages by customers who had meals at Canteen C. For each food outlet, the means of meal preferences by the customers were significantly different ($p < 0.05$). The criteria of choice of foods were bulkiness, social status and price. Two thirds of the customers who participated in the 2011 survey preferred food from campus outlets while one third opted to bring their food from home. Staff at the outlets was aware of good food hygiene and the importance of doing things the right way first time. Students, who constituted the largest portion of customers preferred to have several food outlets on campus. The services offered generally satisfied customers' needs. However, the centres need to take customers' views on their services to enable continuous improvement.

Keywords: Canteen, customers, food service, quality, sadza

INTRODUCTION

In the hospitality industry the greatest challenge faced by service providers is to reconcile the quality of service actually offered with that perceived by the customer. The development of quality management in the hospitality industry has largely followed the pattern set by the manufacturing sector (Bandin, 1997). Early approaches were aimed at specifying and controlling the quality of tangible aspects such as food (Luning *et al.*, 2002). These have been adopted by fast food outlets, but offer little assistance to the management of the meal experience or to getting the best from hotel service. Product oriented concerns of manufacturing industry such as statistical process control and zero defects are of little interest to the food service industry, which emphasizes on first appearances and one off encounters between customer and employees (Anion, 1985).

The food service industry includes restaurants, hospitals, schools and other specialized operations. In conventional food service, foods are purchased at various stages of preparation for an individual operation

and production. Distribution and service are completed on the same premises following preparation. Foods are held hot, refrigerated or stored under other appropriate conditions to maintain wholesomeness. In this industry, quality customer service is the goal of both profit oriented and non-profit making organizations. Quality assurance is output oriented and is essential at every step of operation from the development of procurement specification through distribution and service of a food to customers (Bandin, 1997; Terry and Vincent, 1998).

The control of quality must focus on the food itself, the people involved in the production of the food and the equipment used (Luning *et al.*, 2002; Sutherland, 1994). The overall quality of the food entails the training employees have, sanitation standards, handling and storage conditions.

The University of Zimbabwe community consists of students and staff with the student population exceeding 80%. With increase in the numbers of staff and students, private food outlets were licensed to prepare and sell food on campus. Although the food service facilities were monitored by the local authority's health inspectorate, no study has been done

to find out if the services provided by the outlets satisfy the customers' needs. The objectives of the study were to assess services offered in relation to customers' expectations; investigate consumer preferences of foods and factors considered before buying at particular food outlets. The study is also set to assess the advantages and limitations of having many food service providers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection: Visits to three canteens namely Supermarket canteen A, Canteen B and Canteen C were undertaken, during which management and staff were interviewed to collect information. More data was collected through observation of services and facilities offered by the canteens. Customers were also interviewed to find their opinion on services provided by the food outlets. The data collected was recorded on questionnaires. The number of clients purchasing specific foods was collected and analyzed.

Statistical analysis: The data was plotted on graphs using Graph Pad Prism 4.0 software package. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine the significance of differences among preferences for meals served by each canteen.

RESULTS

Supermarket canteen A: Consumers were mostly interested in buying rice and chicken, boiled eggs, and beverages.

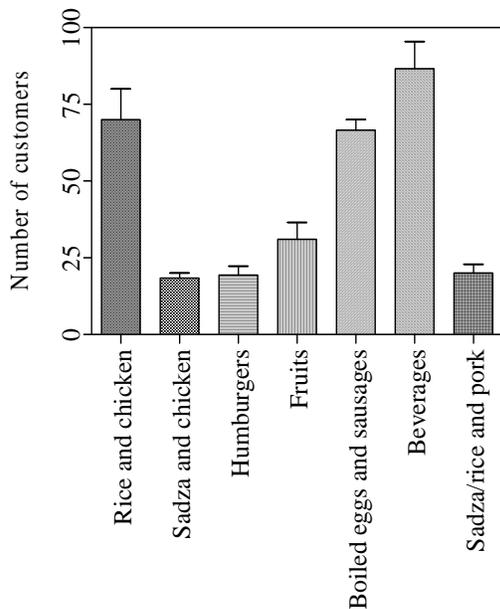


Fig. 1: Means for meals purchased at the supermarket canteen A in June, 2007
The means of the meal preferences are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

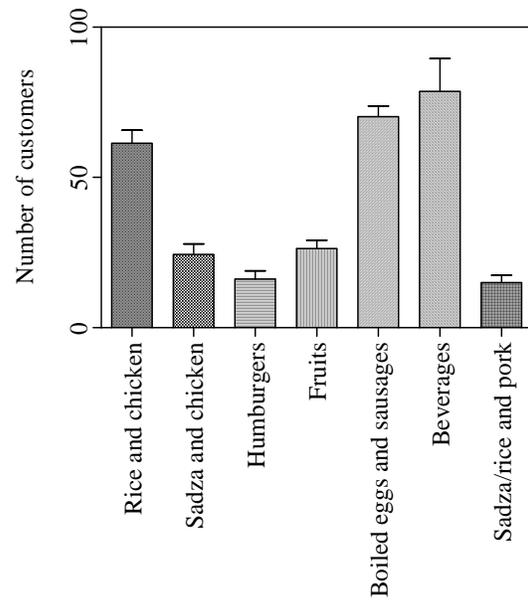


Fig. 2: Means for meals purchased at the supermarket canteen A in June, 2008
The means of the meal preferences are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

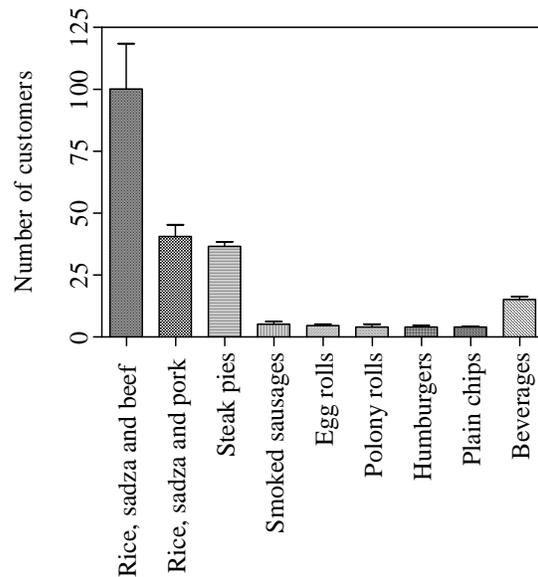


Fig. 3: Means for meals purchased at the supermarket canteen A in June, 2010
The means of the meal preferences are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

sausages and beverages (Fig. 1 and 2). The averages for the meal purchases show that the preference patterns of the customers for 2007 and 2008 were similar. There were differences in some of the food portions served to customers in 2010 compared with data for 2007 and 2008. For each of the meal sets served in 2007, 2008 and 2010, the means of meal preferences were

significantly different ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 1, 2 and 3). In 2010, the highest number of customers preferred the traditional meals that is rice, sadza and beef (47%) and rice, sadza and pork (19%). Sadza is a thickened porridge prepared by heating a mixture of pulverized grains and water. The common form of sadza is made from white maize meal and is the staple food in Zimbabwe and other parts of Southern Africa. There was a low turnout of customers buying processed meats, egg rolls, plain potato chips and beverages (Fig. 3).

The canteen had limited working space and insufficient equipment to keep food hot until the time of serving. The quality of service could be improved by preparing the food in smaller batches so that it can be sold quickly before it cools. Keeping the food hot serves to minimise microbial spoilage although it may lead to overcooking, resulting in undesirable flavors and aromas. Improper storage may result in microbial spoilage, which may lead to food poisoning (Hobbs and Roberts, 1993).

The food handlers had a general knowledge of good food hygiene practice although they were not fully aware of the implications of cross contamination of foods. Working surfaces and floors were regularly sanitized, but no pest control measures were in place. Some staff members were talking while serving food. This potentially results in the transfer of microorganisms from one's mouth to the air then to the food (Anion, 1985).

Some of the customers complained that the food was not worth the assumed value leading some of them to buy burgers sold by a nearby new competitor. The burgers were bigger and were being sold at an affordable price. The attendants to customers did not greet customers or smile to them. This may look minor, but the implication is that the organization loses business to competitors (Bandin, 1997). Poor service quality increases customer dissatisfaction and the likelihood that customers dine at a competitor and become an active companion in persuading others to go elsewhere (Ryu *et al.*, 2012). In another study it was noted that waiting time, staff attitude, food quality and variety significantly affect customer satisfaction (Agnes *et al.*, 2004; Min and Min, 2011). The canteen may lose customers because there is no effective method for customers to share their views on the service provided and the quality expected. The canteen staff needed to appreciate that quality is measured against customers' expectations.

However the canteen conforms to certain quality standards. Quality concepts such as Clean as You go and First in First Out were implemented at the canteen. The concepts are essential in reducing microbial cross contamination and food spoilage during storage.

The canteen staffs were aware of the importance of doing things right 1st time. Doing the right thing 1st time

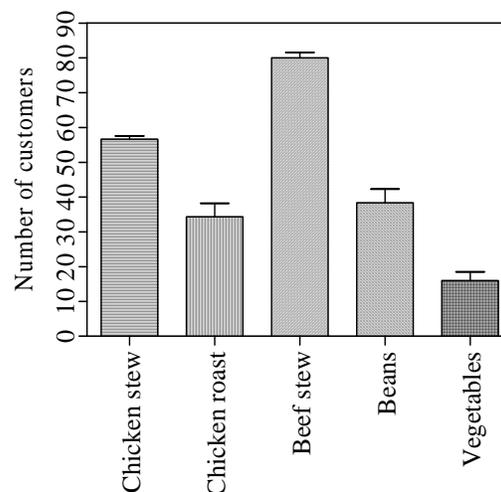


Fig. 4: Means for meals purchased at canteen B in June, 2007
The means of the meal preferences are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

minimizes losses through spoilage and reworks. It reduces production costs and maximizes profits. To ensure that the right thing was done, each meal had a documented recipe, which was followed during preparation. Such process procedures helped to ensure availability, convenience and consistence of meals.

The totals of customers at the end of each day were generally lower for 2010 than for the previous years 2007 and 2008. The differences may be attributed to competition from nearby recently opened food outlets and street food vendors. The increase in the number of food outlets was a result of the official use of the US dollar as the local currency that was sanctioned by the government at the beginning of 2009. In order to increase the number of customers, it is important to carry out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis for the business.

Canteen B: The meals served were sadza with chicken stew, roasted chicken, beef stew, beans and plain vegetables. Sadza and beef had the highest number of customers, followed by sadza with chicken stew, beans, roasted chicken and plain vegetables. Beef stew was affordable to most customers (36%) compared with chicken stew (25%) and roasted chicken (15%). The means of the preferences for the meals served at canteen B were significantly different ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 4). In other instances, some customers may choose to have vegetables and beef as relish to the sadza. A sample of such a meal which is regarded as delicious to the local community is shown in Fig. 5.

Plain vegetables had the lowest number of customers. Most customers felt shy to buy plain vegetables as they somehow reflected on the poor economic status of the customer. For the sake of public



Fig. 5: Meal of sadza with beef and vegetables as relish
The sadza is a thick gel prepared by heating a mixture of maize meal and water. The meal is a staple food for Central and Southern Africa

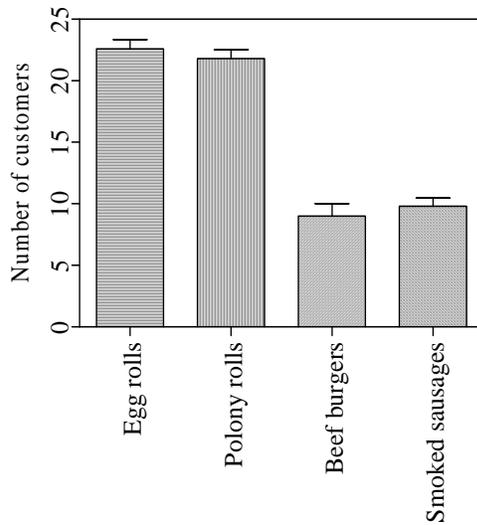


Fig. 6: Means for meals purchased at canteen C in June, 2007
The means of the meal preferences are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

image most customers avoided plain vegetables. The distribution pattern of the meals purchased for the duration of the survey is shown in Fig. 4.

The staff members were prompt in their serving and long queues were uncommon except at peak hour (12:30 to 1:30 pm) when most of the customers break for lunch. Staff members were aware of the importance of doing the right thing right first time concept. They knew the implications of rework as a result of for example adding too much salt to food, preparing burnt or undercooked food to customers.

Due to high inflation and price controls set by the government, the outlet could not add variety to the meals served. The size and capacity of the canteen was small and could not serve large numbers of customers. Power cuts which were frequent limited the quantities of food prepared and served. When there was no electricity, the canteen had to purchase fire wood, which was more expensive than electricity.

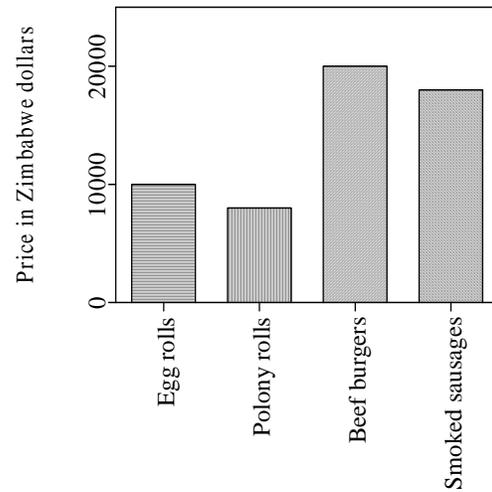


Fig. 7: Prices of meals sold at canteen C in June, 2007

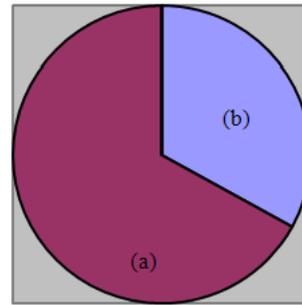


Fig. 8: Students purchasing pattern.
a: Students who preferred to buy food sold on campus;
b: Students who preferred to bring food from home

Canteen C: The canteen prepared egg rolls, beef burgers, polony rolls and smoked sausages for sale. Egg rolls contained fried egg, tomato and onion. Beef burgers comprised of wheat flour bun sandwich containing meat patty, tomato, onion and lettuce. Polony rolls consisted of a wheat flour bun sandwiching polony slice, tomato and onion. Most of the customers preferred egg rolls (33%) and polony rolls (33%) to beef burgers (16.7%) and smoked sausages (16.7%). The means of preferences for the foods available at canteen C were significantly different ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 6). As shown in the Fig. 6 and 7, the order of preference of the foods is inversely related to the price of the food item.

2011 survey: A survey was conducted in 2011 to establish the proportion of customers purchasing food from campus outlets. In the survey, all customers who participated were students. The results are presented in Fig. 8.

Of the students interviewed, one third did not buy food sold on campus. They preferred to bring food from home as they believed that food prepared at home is more nutritious than that sold by the private outlets.

Most students preferred to buy food sold at canteens run by the University because they believe that the quality of food is much better than that of food from private food outlets.

DISCUSSION

Hamburgers and fruits were regarded by some customers as luxuries and were preferred by most ladies who did not like sadza. Some customers did not eat pork because of their religious beliefs. Others preferred hamburgers because they needed light meals during the day. Alternatives for such customers were beverages, boiled eggs and sausages. Other consumers felt that reading requires a lot of energy hence they preferred meals like sadza with chicken or pork. Some consumers based their choices on price. Other buyers considered the quality of the food especially the safety aspect. This relates well to a study in which employees responding to a premarketing survey rated food quality and price as the factors most important in the purchase decision (Carol *et al.*, 1997). When asked why they preferred the supermarket canteen meals while there were other outlets serving less expensive meals, some said that the alternative food outlets were too far from their learning places. Some customers believed that low prices were related to poor quality, such that buying low priced meals would lower their social status. Those who believed that satisfaction is brought about by bulkiness of the food could buy bread, boiled eggs and sausages.

Unreliable power supplies experienced adversely affected the temporary storage of perishables such as meat, milk and vegetables. Poor lighting in the food preparation, storage and serving premises resulted from the inadequate power supplies. Bad lighting may lead to accidents during food preparation. Power cuts have led to serving of food at lower temperatures, resulting in reduced flavor and aroma that are partly responsible for attracting customers.

Most of the customers who were students preferred to have many food service providers on campus. The advantages cited were reduced crowding, lower prices, variety and good customer care. However, tracing is difficult in cases of food poisoning and monitoring of all the food outlets may not be done efficiently. Other cited limitations of one food service provider were lack of competition, long queues, overpricing and limited variety of foods.

CONCLUSION

The services offered generally met the customers' needs, but the centres need to take customers' views on their services to enable continuous improvement. Food handlers were aware of good food hygiene practices. The foods most preferred in 2007 and 2008 at the Supermarket canteen A were rice and chicken, boiled eggs, sausages and beverages. Most of the customers

who bought food from Canteen B chose to buy sadza with beef stew and sadza with chicken stew. The largest number of Canteen C customers preferred egg rolls and polony rolls. In 2010 most customers preferred rice, sadza and beef, rice sadza and pork and steak pies. The criteria of choice were based on status, bulkiness and price. In 2011, two thirds of the customers who were interviewed in the survey preferred to buy food sold on campus while one third opted to bring food prepared from home. Most of the customers preferred to have many food outlets on campus for the purpose of improvement of services provided.

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