RESEARCH ARTICLE

CUSTOMERS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, EXPECTATIONS AND ACTUAL EXPERIENCES BEFORE AND AFTER VISITS TO CATERING ESTABLISHMENTS IN AND AROUND THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Customer service plays a vital role in any business especially the catering industry which is a "people" industry and so the main purpose of the study was to investigate the quality of customer service in catering establishments in and around the University of Cape Coast. Data was collected from 200 purposively selected regular restaurant customers of hotels and restaurants in and around Cape Coast using questionnaires with closed-ended items. Respondents were asked to rate their expectations prior to their visits and their actual experiences using a scale of 5. The data were coded and analysed using SPSS, version 17. Means were computed and the paired 'sample t-test was used to determine whether significant differences between the means of customers' prior expectations and actual experiences were significant. The key findings were that, 85.0% of means were above the general mean, signifying that the customers' satisfaction was met. However, there were highly significant differences between the means of customers' expectations prior to visit and their actual experiences during and after the visits, indicating that some of their expectations were not fully met, although they were satisfied with the services received. Among the recommendations were that management should constantly train and educate staff to be abreast with modern trends of providing quality service and also meals served should have a good variety and be worth the price at which they are being sold.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The increased demand for catering services has escalated the growth of hospitality industry globally, leading to intense competition creating the need for better differentiation of the products. Johns (1995) noted that the catering and hospitality industry is a purely customer service industry, and customers come down for provision of service on behalf of the outlet. The hospitality industry is purely service-based and labour intensive, since more personnel are required in the production as compared to the manufacturing industry where more equipment is needed. This means that services provided need certain qualities on delivery to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer, not just the quality of products such as food and beverage itself but also quality of service personnel, the delivery process and surrounding environment that will support meeting customers' expectations (Johns, 1995). Service, as defined by Kotler (1991), refers to any activity or

benefit that one party can offer to another that is intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product. Service quality is one of the important factors in catering industry, especially with the food and beverage operations such as restaurants, bars, cafeteria and hotels. It is believed that in recent times customers have had more expectations about the service they get based on their knowledge and excessive access to information. Zerthomel and Bitner (2003) suggested five dimensions of service quality to include the following: reliability, responsiveness, accuracy, empathy and tangibles, that service providers have to put into consideration to deliver quality service to meet customers' expectations. In addition to these elements of service quality, the catering establishment must ensure that the technology being used is up to date and other quality standards set by the business are met. Rande (1996) asserted that improving and maintaining high service standard should not be viewed as a goal to be met but rather as an on-going and unending process. The ultimate measure of an establishment's success in satisfying its customers is also the most effective form of advertising through the word of mouth. Rande argued that customers are those who will judge whether the service is successful, and so are the people who must ultimately be satisfied. Cape Coast has a high concentration of

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second cycle and tertiary educational institutions. These have contributed to a high population of students, workers and visitors. Being a regional capital with several historical sites and the Kakum forest, it has a high influx of visitors. All the factors have contributed to a lot of customers who often eat out; thus increasing the demand for catering services in the metropolis, particularly, in and around the university.

Statement of the Problem

The demands of the catering industry, high levels of education, coupled with foreign travels, mass and social media, the internet have resulted in making customers' expectations more sophisticated. As suggested by Ellis (2002) it requires employees to be competent, work quickly, have a do-it-now attitude, and have the customer in the mind. Ellis again asserted that most frequent reasons for customers not returning to a catering or hospitality outlet include the following: rooms not well cleaned, not feeling safe or secured in the service environment, too much noise, slow service, unfriendly, discourteous staff, high rates or prices of service and products, inadequate menu, unpalatable food, unwholesome food item and unsightly surroundings. Good service is very important because of its crucial role in determining the customer's perception of the value of the meal. The higher the level of the service provided with the food, the more the customer is generally willing to pay. Although the quality of food served is important, the level and the quality of service provided will have a more lasting effect on most customers. All other factors being equal, a mediocre meal of lesser quality, but presented with superb, attentive service will result in a satisfied customer. In contrast, an excellently prepared meal made of high quality ingredients but with poor service will result in a dissatisfied customer. Cape Coast University does not provide any catering services for its students and with the high student and staff populations, as well as parents, guardians and other visitors and tourists who come the university, several food outlets have been set up around the campus. Students and staff eat from these food outlets for a number of reasons and so like every customer, it is very important that all needs that will lead to customer satisfaction are identified and attended to so as to bring customer satisfaction. Very often a lot of complaints are heard from people who visit the catering establishments Customers discuss the services received in terms of what they expected and the real services they receive. This contention pre-supposes that there is a gap that needs to be bridged. It is in this light that an investigation of the quality of customer service in catering establishments in and around the University of Cape Coast.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the quality of customer service in catering establishments in the University of Cape Coast and its environs.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives for the study are to:

1. Examine the background characteristics of the selected consumers who patronise catering establishments in and around the University of Cape Coast;

2. Identify customers' expectations about service quality in catering establishments in the study area prior to the visit;
3. Investigate the views of customers about the actual experience in terms of the services rendered by the catering establishments in the study area during and after their visit to the establishments;
4. Assess whether the characteristics of the customers match their overall expectations and actual experiences received from the various catering establishments visited;
5. Suggest strategies that can be adopted to improve customer service delivery.

Hypotheses

H_0: There is no significant difference between customers with different background characteristics, such as, gender, age, marital status, educational level, and position in their establishments on their overall expectations of catering services prior to the visit.

H_0: There is no significant difference between customers with different background characteristics, such as, gender, age, marital status, educational level, and position in their establishments on their overall experiences of catering services receive after their visits.

Significance of the Study

The findings from the study will bring to light problems associated with customer needs and satisfaction of service delivery in catering establishments. The findings and recommendations when made available to the public would be beneficial to customers as it will enable them assess quality service and make informed decisions. Recommendations from the study when adopted by managements of catering establishments will help customers have optimum quality service. The findings and recommendations, when applied by management, will help them in giving in-service or on the job training to their service staff to deliver quality service. Finally, researchers and students could equally use findings and recommendations of this research for further research and studies.

Limitations Delimitation

The study is restricted to small and medium restaurants in and around the University of Cape Coast. The main constraints to the success of this study were that some of the respondents were not willing to answer the questionnaires; others did not return the questionnaires at all or delayed. Some of the establishments were not willing to allow the researchers to talk or deliver the questionnaires to their customers.

Review of related literature

Types of Catering Establishment

Johns (1995) defined catering as outlets for meeting the basic needs of food, drink and accommodation of people. Catering establishments could be any building, premises or other establishments, including kiosks, however described, and purveying for reward food and or beverages including wines and spirits, for consumption.

Attracting Customers

This section focus largely on the service providers' perspective in discussing the pressures commercial hospitality operators have to face in their attempt to attract customers. Beardsworth and Bryman (1999) had argued that the current highly developed commercial hospitality industry is a product of the linked process of the industrialization and modernization. These processes have allowed a clear move from eating out because of necessity to the firms' establishment of eating out at leisure as its own right. Modern catering production techniques allow an operator to provide a high level of stimulation but with the confines of a complete safety. Beardsworth and Bryman added that the marketing activities of hospitality providers are simply a way of duping the customer and hiding the fact that, these services are provided as part of profit-oriented commercial operation. To them, it is more likely that customers know very well that the services and the settings they receive are under pinned by business ethic. The customer does not feel that the hospitality they have received is any less "real" or "sincere" simply because commercialization rears its head when they are asked to pay the bill or offered the opportunity to purchase the product (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999). The restaurant customer is definitely aware of whatever goes on. Attracting customers offers the catering outlet the opportunity to be more responsive to customers and still have the advantages of efficiency and tight control through highly developed production systems that guarantee consistency and safety. Commercial catering business is driven by underlying business ethic and should not be compared to domestic hospitality on a large scale. The challenge facing commercial catering outlet is to capitalized on the highly developed technologies and systems of operation that are available and enabling employees to provide exactly the food and service that the customers wants and is prepared to pay for. Loyalty marketing is a way of making sure that the customers who are repeating business on a regular bases benefit from their loyalty, collecting data and number-crunching are vital for the process to be successful. Loyalty marketing needed to "become of age" and customer-driven organizations are able to employ today's sophisticated loyalty marketing process. It is very vital to be able to see who your valuable customers are and adopt strategies to attract and maintain them (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999).

Wikipedia explanation of customer focus refers to it as only one element of the relationship between a company and its customers. Customer focus must lead to something meaningful and will probably require sacrifices and it is just one of the steps necessary to become customer-centric. A customer focus puts your customer high on your list of priorities. When you put your customers into the heart of your business, make customers part of your business culture then you start to the opportunity of building customer loyalty.

Service

The functional aspect of service is intangible and includes the speed at which an employee attends to customer inquiries, a degree to which an employee is willing to help a customer and the manner in which an employee speak to a customer. The image aspect of service includes the companies or the establishment's reputation. An organization's reputation is built through advertising, price, performance and customer expectations, perceptions and experiences. The quality of every service is dependent on these three components stated above. Blending the component together should provide customers with a value added service that exceeds expectation. Berger (2009) further noted that the underlying assumption is that by delivery quality service that satisfies customers, organization can attract, retain and grow a solid customer base.

Customer Service

Customer service is anything being done for customers to enhance the customer's experience. They are those activities and benefits that the hospitality industry offers for sale or provide in connection with sale of foods and services (Ocansey, 2000). Customers have certain reasons buying a particular goods and services. They also have reasons for buying from one establishment instead of another. Ocansey (2000) also outlined the following reasons why firms provide customer service:

a. To help in attracting and keeping customers, thus building customer loyalty.
b. To enable the hospitality and catering outlets handle customer complaints and enquiries effectively.
c. Organizations also provide customer service so that they can develop establish and maintain a long lasting relationship with their customers.
d. To help the sales and marketing department achieve their objectives.
e. The provision of superior quality customer care can help the organization to compete effectively and in certain instance, achieve competitive advantage.

Customer services are offered to attract customers, increase sales and add to customer's comfort and convenience. Johns (1995) highlights that there is the need to ensure every member of staff including senior management, junior staff and even trainees to feel that they can contribute to customer services and are ready to put the customer first in order to be successful. Every member of staff must want and believe it to happen, understand how to achieve customer satisfaction and provide the "added value" and exceptional service. Customers may be regular, occasional or chance. Employees are to form relationship with them which can be directly or indirectly. Direct relationship involves face-to-face interactions as part of reception desk, in a restaurant or work in the fast food outlet. It can also be by telephone, which is receiving an enquiry for room, restaurant bookings or dealing with complaints. Indirect relationship include offering a service which the customer receives but does not interacts and come into direct contact with the employee, for example cooks in the kitchen. Berger (2009) again hinted that customer service delivery can have significant impact on the success of catering and hospitality outlets that deliver a consistently high level of customer service. Both can charge more for their services and see the impact of service in the expansion of their market share. Providing quality service for customer should be a primary goal for managers. They should maintain efficient operations and ensure that employees are consistently providing quality service. Berger (2009) again suggested the following points for managers to observe in ensuring employees can affect service encounter through personality, displayed emotions and communication.

Communication

Berger (2009) argued that, the channel used to transmit message has a direct impact on how that message is perceived.

Laing and Robert (2005) also posited that the level and the tone of voice can give a strong message as the actual words you say. Dix and Baird (1988) suggest the use of a clear and well modulated tone, pronouncing words clearly and never dropping the first or last letters of words is very important during communication. When speaking to customer, the tone of your voice relays signal and evokes different responses depending on your manner and emphasis placed on the spoken word. It is not easy, in the hotel and catering industry, after long hours of duty not to feel tired and let it show by our tone of voice and the manner we speak

Assessing Service Quality

The benefits of providing effective and superior customer service are numerous such as increases in organization's customer base and customer loyalty and subsequent increase in profit (Ocansey, 2000). He posits that if customer care programmes are to work, the following conditions must be met:

(a) Staff must be committed to the customer care programme, well trained in customer service and sufficiently resourced to carry out their roles.

(b) The programme must provide clear benefit to staff, that is, both financial and non-financial incentives must be given to them. Motivating staff to carry it or provide effective customer care. It is important that management must be informed about progress and effectiveness of staff performance and the staff should be provided with regular and appropriate information.

Customer care must be perceived as every employee's responsibility. In the control of services and standard, it is important that company keeps control of systems that are likely to affect customer care. This involves trying to achieve the consistency and the use of procedures in providing services. Complaints and enquiries received from customers must be handled effectively and efficiently (Ocansey, 2000). Berger (2009) said the quality of systems for identifying the level of customer satisfaction and customer needs; the standard procedures should be clearly defined with the involvement of staff and samples of customers' views, to enable the staff follow them well. Matching of the product and service to customer needs; it is important for staff to recognize, interpret and act upon clues and comments that customers make about the standards of the organization products and services. In addition, you should know the actions that you can take and the mechanism of reporting back to your supervisors or manager.

Factors that Make Organization Loose Customers

Ellis (2002) also explained nine factors which will make organization loose customers. These include:

i.   Indifference: A don't care attitude from the bar-attendant or the waiter.
ii. Delay: If you are slow to serve customers they will assume you think they are unimportant.
iii. Haughtiness: Never give a customer the impression that you think you are in some way superior. Never hint that a customer has chosen an inappropriate drink or is drinking it in the wrong way. If the customer wants it that way that is the right way. Never make a customer feel ignorant or embarrassed. Always try to understand customers, never judge them. You need them.
iv. Over familiarity: Customers are entitled to be treated with respect. Remember they are very important people and should be treated as VIPs. Being friendly is not the same thing as being familiar. Being familiar, for example, by using a patron's first name, only if you are certain that, that particular customer expects and encourages it.
v.   Over insistence: While a bar attendant or anyone else serving food or drinks is a sale person you can insist too much. High-pressure selling will not leave customer with a feeling of satisfaction.
vi. Ignorance: You must know your product, the drinks (and food) you have to sell and how to serve them. Ignorance destroys confidence.
vii. Argumentativeness: Don't attempt to match wits with a patron. No one ever won an argument with a customer. Replace a drink if it is said to be wrong, whether or not you think there is anything wrong with it.
viii. Carelessness: Don't make mistakes particularly in charging.
ix. Dishonesty: Failure to admit mistakes, deceitful practices, a suspicion that you may have substituted something inferior for what was ordered or offered, all these will lose customers for ever.

Conceptual framework

Quintana (2006) suggested that customers' perception of the quality of service yield success. The expectation is known to come before the service is rendered, while perception comes after the service has been received and thus the customer thinks about the service or product that is offered. In this way, perceptions are considered relative to expectations because the two are normally together (Zeithaml, Bogeitner & Gremler, 2009). According to Aksoy, Atilgan and Akinci (2003), background characteristics tend to be among the major determinants of consumer buying behaviour. These characteristics have been found to play significant roles in customer needs. The assumption is that customers with different individual characteristics may or may not have different reasons for behaving the way they do. Demographic variables such as gender, age, marital studies, education and position in the establishments have been found to exert an important influence on the overall perception of service quality (Kim & Lough, 2007). Females and males have been found to have significant differences in their perceptions and expectations (Kuruvilla, Joshi & Shah, 2009; Helgesen & Nesset, 2010). Melnyk, Van Osselaer and Bijmolt (2009) found out that females tend to expect more than males, although every situation depends on what the individuals are expecting. Stafford (1996) argued that desires and needs change and also develop as an individual grows, thus making age a critical factor that assists in marketing. Hagan's (2015) study is one of the studies on the effect of age on perception and expectation levels. He found significant differences between perception and expectation levels of customers of various age groups. The relationship between marital status and expectations of customers has been found by Genre-Grandpierre (2015) has been found to be vary. On education, research found higher levels of education to be important factor that influences the expectations of customers (Mittal &

Kamakura, 2001), while Kim and Lough (2007) revealed that people with tertiary education exert an important influence on the overall perception of service quality. Genre-Grandpierre (2015) investigated the impact of employment status on customer expectations based on their buying decisions. Other researchers, such as Korgaonkar, Lund & Price (1985) have demonstrated that income has a negative impact on customers' expectations and that customers with higher income tend to expect more from service providers since they are paying huge sums of money to experience the best. On the other hand, Fraikue (2014) revealed from his study that unemployed or low income earners have higher expectations than the highly paid customers.

In sum, good-quality service exceeds the expectations of customers. The catering outlets need to be identified with the service or products they are offering and give the customer a sense of belonging and being cared for. Customer's expectations have risen over the last decade, with greater leisure, disposal income, increased travel, and in generally greater knowledge of what a catering and hospitality establishment can now offer (Berger, 2009; Ellis (2002).. Customers' expectations have become more sophisticated due to education and demands of the industry requires employees to be competent, work quickly, have a do-it-now attitude, and have the customer in the mind. Most frequent reasons for customers not returning to a catering or hospitality outlet include the following; room not well clean, not feeling safe or secured in the service environment, too much noise, slow service, unfriendly, discourteous staff, high rates or prices of service and products, inadequate menu, unpalatable food, unwholesome food item and unsightly surroundings (Berger, 2009; Ellis (2002). If these are taken care of, and customer expectations are met, the customer will be loyal and the establishment will have higher sales.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design selected for the study was the descriptive survey design, which involves the collection of data concerning the current state of affairs or prevailing conditions and observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way by (Shuttleworth, 2008). This research design was ideal for this research work as the study seeks to describe and determine how consumers evaluate the nature of prevailing conditions, practices and attitudes of service staff, the premises, equipment towards customers. Descriptive research design has universal usage and can be used for either qualitative or quantitative analysis. It observes, describes and documents aspects of the situations as they naturally occur. However, Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) identified weaknesses of descriptive survey, which include difficulty in ensuring that the questions being answered are clear and not misleading and also getting respondents to answer questions thoughtfully and honestly.

Population Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population for the study comprised of customers who visit guest houses and restaurants on the university campus and those in the villages around the university. In view of these, it was not possible to get a sample frame and so purposive and incidental sampling procedures were used

because it involved the selection of people based on customers' judgement of the quality of service in catering establishments, using some criteria. The respondents were selected as they visited the restaurants. Sarantakos (1997) stated that a sample helps to study a relatively small number of units in place of the target population, and to obtain data that are representative of the whole target population. Two hundred respondents, consisting of lecturers, registrars, students, and other workers of the university who patronised the catering establishments in the study area, at least, twice a week were purposively selected. In view of this, the individual catering establishments did not form the basis of sampling, however, 15 small and medium establishments were involved based on the having an employee size of 10 or more, furniture and clean premises.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires, lists of questions and statements relating to the aims of the study, hypothesis and research questions to be verified and answered, to which the respondent is required to answer by writing were used to elicit information from the respondents (Tamakloe, Amedahe & Atta, 2005). The questionnaire consisted of three sections A, B and C., all close-ended items. Section A comprised items on background characteristics of the respondents. Section B centred on customers' expectations prior to service, while Section C also centred on the actual customers' experiences. The expectations/experiences were therefore categorized into four thematic areas based on factors identified by Collie and Spark (1999), Ellis (2002) and Kozak and Remington (1998) as factors which will make organization loose customers. These critical areas were: 1. Appearance and behaviour of staff, 2. Characteristics of the premises/equipment/and tools; 3 Characteristics of the food served 4. Customers' final experience. Each respondent was expected to indicate his/her expectations before and after the visit on a scale of 1 to 5.

Data Collection Procedure

Two hundred and twenty pre-tested questionnaires were administered to the respondents by five trained assistants at the premises of 15 restaurants and small hotels. Permission was sought from the management of the catering establishments before the study and some of them gave a lot of assistance. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents before the questionnaires were given out personally to them. It took between 15 and 25 minutes to complete the questionnaires and return them after they had had their meals. Some of them opted to take their questionnaires away to be returned at a later date because they had other duties. This contributed to inability to collect all the 220 questionnaires. However, 200 (90.1%) were collected.

Data Analysis

Data collected were edited to remove inconsistencies in responses. After editing, the items were coded and organized according to the research questions. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Services and Solution (SPSS). Means were computed and the paired sample t-test was used to determine whether significant differences between the means of customers' prior expectations and actual experiences were significant. Tables of frequencies, figures and percentages were used to present the data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background Characteristics of Staff and Customers

This section concentrated on the background information of both staff and customers, in relation to their gender, age, marital status and level of education. The frequency distribution tables, figures and percentages were used in presenting the data. The responses gathered from the staff and customers are shown in Tables 1.

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	N	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age in years	200		
18 – 27		45	22.5
28 – 37		76	38.0
38 – 47		54	27.0
48 – 59		25	12.5
Gender	200		
Male		87	56.5
Female		113	43.5
Marital Status	200		
Never married		101	50.5
Married		85	42.5
Divorced/Separated/ Widowed/		14	7.0
Highest Educational Level	200		
Senior high school		51	25.5
Undergraduates		92	46.0
Post graduates		57	28.5
Occupation	200		
Junior Staff		37	18.5
Students		94	47.0
Senior Staff		39	19.5
Senior members		30	15.0

Source: Field Data, 2016

The data presented in Figure 1 indicate that most of the respondents, representing 60.5% were aged between18 and 49 years. The remaining 39.5% were between the ages of 39 and 59 years. In the same table, the percentage of females was 56.5 and the males were 43.5%. This shows that there more males than females. The analysis of the marital status of the respondents show that about half (50.5%0 had never married, 42.5% were married and only (14.0%) were divorced, separated or widowed. On the level of education, all the respondents had had formal education, with the least educational level being senior high school certificate, 92 (46.0% were undergraduates, while the remainder, 57 (28.5%) had postgraduate certificate. From these findings, it can be seen that the respondents were highly educated and so could understand the questionnaire very well. The sample was taken from the university community and so the likelihood of getting highly educated sample was high.

Customers' Expectations about Service Quality in Catering Establishments

According to Berger (2009), customers arrive with a set of needs and expectations about the service and the environment in which the service will be delivered. These expectations or needs have to be satisfied for them to return otherwise the establishment may lose customers. The expectations/ experiences were categorized into four thematic areas based on

factors identified by Collie and Spark (1999), Ellis (2002) and Kozak and Remington (1998) as factors which will make organization loose customers. These areas are: 1. Appearance and behaviour of staff, 2. Characteristics of the premises, equipment and tools; 3 Characteristics of the food served and 4. Customers' overall evaluation. Each respondent was expected to indicate his/her expectations before and after the visit on a scale of 1 to 5.The means of the customers' scaling of the various thematic areas are illustrated in Tables 2 to 5. It can be observed from Table 2a that the customers had very high expectations prior to the visit on the characteristics and behaviour of staff and the means for all the statements were between 3.96 and 4.62, much higher than the general mean of 3. The standard deviations are all less than 1 indicating that the distributions were close. The overall mean is 4.31 and the only statement that had 3.96 is 'Employees demonstrate professional skills and accuracy in service delivery.'

On the actual experiences during and after the visit, the overall mean is 3.55 and the means of 10 of the statements are between 3.40 and 3.94, all above the general mean of 3. The statement 'Enthusiasm on part of staff in their tone voice' was the only statement with a mean of 2.82, below the general mean of 3. The reason for this could be that a few respondents could have had very unpleasant experiences and so their low scores had reduced the total mean for that statement. All the results of the Two- tailed Paired Samples Test returned 0.000 at 95% Confidence Interval. This test results reveal that the differences between prior and after visit experiences were highly significant at p = 0.05. The statement 'Enthusiasm on part of staff in their tone voice was the only statement with a mean below 3. It is of concern because the channel used to transmit message, the level and the tone of voice must be watched. Berger (2009), Dix and Baird (1988) and Laing and Robert (2005) suggest the use of a clear and well modulated tone, pronouncing words clearly and never dropping the first or last letters of words is very important during communication. As Dix and Baird (1988) noted, in the hotel and catering industry, after long hours of duty the staff tend to feel tired and may allow let it show by in tone of voice and the manner they speak. Employees have to be competent, work quickly and who possess a do-it-now attitude, with the customer in the mind. The results of the Two-tailed Paired Samples Test indicated that the differences between the expectations prior to the visit and the actual experiences during and after the visit were statistically significant at 0.05% significant level. The result is not surprising because, a number of authors, including Berger (2009) and Ellis (2002) revealed that customers' expectation have become more sophisticated due to education and industrialization. The respondents could not get the all their expectations on the characteristics of the staff fulfilled. However, the general means of the actual experiences after the visits were above 3.00, which may be a sign of satisfaction with the services received.

The data presented in Table 2b show that means of customers' expectations and actual experiences on characteristics of the premises, equipment and tools were 4.41 and 3.06 both above 3.00, meaning they were satisfied with the services. The means for the expectations prior to the visits were between 4.09 and 4.63. The distributions were also close as shown by standard deviations between o.73 and 1.07. Three of the five statements had means 3.12, 3.16 and 3.88 respectively, also above the general mean of 3.00.

Table 2a. Means and Standard Deviations of Customers' Expectations and Actual Experiences on Appearance and Behaviour of Staff

Statements	Expectation prior to visit Mean	Standard Deviation	Actual experiences after visit Mean	Standard Deviation
1.To be welcomed with a greeting	4.52	0.94	3.94	0.83
2.Enthusiasm on part of staff in their tone voice	4.62	0.73	2.82	1.12
3.Prompt service by professionally dressed service staff	4.50	0.78	3.76	0.82
4.No excessive wearing of make-up, jewelly, and usage of strong performance	4.53	0.71	3.40	0.91
5.Service staff have no body odour, and halitosis	4.03	0.86	3.51	0.74
6.Service staff practise open and friendly body language and eye contact	4.06	0.87	3.46	0.93
7.Employees demonstrate professional skills and accuracy in service delivery	3.96	0.84	3.62	0.96
8.The service staff tells you exactly when services will be performed	4.21	0.83	3.64	0.80
9.Employees respond quickly and cheerfully to customers requests with nice tone of voice when talking to guests	4.28	0.98	3.62	0.98
10. Ready anticipation of verbal and non-verbal expressed of customer needs	4.28	0.98	3.62	0/96
11. Honest staff who admit their mistakes	4.46	0.68	3.64	0.80
Overall mean	4.31		3.55	

Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 2b. Means and Standard Deviations of Customers' Expectations and Actual Experiences on Characteristics of the Premises, Equipment and Tools

Statements	Expectation prior to visit Mean	Standard Deviation	Actual experiences after visit Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The establishment has appropriate and neatly set-up furniture	4.63	0.71	3.12	0.73
2. The dining equipment is modern and user friendly	4.50	0.71	2.35	0.66
3. Dining room table clothes and serviettes are clean and well iron	4.41	0.81	3.88	0.73
4. Appropriate and adequate cutlery, plates and glasses are used for the right meal service	4.40	0.87	2.80	0.99
5. Correct table set- up with clean and visually appealing cutlery and cruets correctly placed	4.09	0.74	3.16	1.07
Overall Mean	4.41		3.06	

Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 2c: Means and Standard Deviation of Customers' Expectations and Actual Experiences of Characteristics of the Food Served

Statements	Expectation prior to visit Mean	Standard Deviation	Actual experiences after visit Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The establishment food served is well garnished to make them appealing.	4.41	0.83	3.76	0.88
2. Portions of food served are worth for the selling price.				
3. The establishments have variation of food on their menu.	4.46	0.97	3.46	0.86
4. Food served is of the right temperature.	4.59	0.59	3.23	1.11
5. The establishment's foods served are appetizing and tasty	4.64	0.64	3.35	0.82
	4.71	0.62	3.84	1.04
Overall mean	4.56		3.53	

Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 2d. Means and Standard Deviations of Customers' Overall Expectations and Actual Experiences of the Services Received

Statements	Expectation prior to visit Mean	Standard Deviation	Actual experiences after visit Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The establishment's service meets my expectations.	4.02	0.92	3.71	0.87
2. Services rendered worth every money paid.	4.39	0.97	3.51	1.06
3. My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable.	4.26	0.90	2.86	1.10
4. To be able to repeat or return to this catering establishment.	4.44	0.88	3.70	0.91
5. To be able to recommend this catering establishment to my friends and business associates	4.49	0.81	3.60	0.81
Overall Mean	4.32		3.48	

Source: Filed Data, 2016

Table 3. Results of the Analyses on the Differences between Customers' Background Characteristics and Overall Expectations Before the Visit

	Independent t-test		ANOVA		ANOVA		ANOVA		ANOVA	
Statements	Gender		Age		Marital Status		Educ.]Level		Position	
	t-test	Sig. (2- tailed	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
1. The establishment's service meets my expectation	.418	.827	4.382	.005*	.742	.477	1.613	.202	1.769	.164
2. Services rendered worth every money paid.	.831	.249	3.169	.025*	.829	.438	1.068	.346	2.528	.059
3. My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable.	2.342	.294	1.302	.275	1.132	. 325	.907	.406	5.089	.002*
4. To be able to repeat or return to this catering establishment. business	4.792	.186	1.840	.141	1.010	.366	.2.567	.079	3.818	.011*
5. To be able to recommend this catering establishment to my friends and others	12.305	.146	1.421	.570	.535	.567	1.248	.289	.518	.670

*: Significant p = 0.05
Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 4. Results of the Analyses on the Differences between Customers' Background Characteristics and Overall Actual Experiences of Catering Services

	Independent t-test		ANOVA		ANOVA		ANOVA		ANOVA	
Statements	Gender		Age		Marital Status		Educ. Level		Position	
	t-test	Sig. (2- tailed	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
1. The establishment's service meets my expectation	.540	.590	1.407	.242	2.039	.133	2.652	.050	.429	.652
2. Services rendered worth every money paid.	.201	.841	1.701	.168	.172	.842	.686	.562	.004	.996
3. My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable.	.736	.463	3.231	.023	.604	. 548	.608	.611	.175	.840
4. To be able to repeat or return to this catering establishment. business	.661	.509	0.793	.499	.769	.465	.423	.737	.146	.864
5. To be able to recommend this catering establishment to my friends and others	.354	.723	2.467	.063	.535	.587	.746	.526	.868	.422

Source: Field Data, 2016

However, two statements 'The dining equipment is modern and user friendly' and 'Appropriate and adequate cutlery, plates and glasses are used for the right meal service' had means (2.35 and 2.80) were both below 3. The customers did not seem to have been satisfied with these two items concerning the characteristics of the premises, and equipment and tools provided for the service. All the means of the experiences prior to the visit were higher than the actual experiences during and after visit. The results of the Two-tailed Paired Samples Test once more returned 0.000 at 95% Confidence Interval, meaning that the differences between the expectations prior to the visit and the actual experiences during and after the visit were statistically significant. These mean that the respondents could not get the all their expectations fulfilled in terms of characteristics of the premises, equipment and tools. The means obtained from the analysis of customers' expectations prior to the visit and actual experiences on the characteristics of the food served as shown in Table 2c indicate that the respondents had quite high expectations prior to the visit. The means obtained ranged from 4.41 to 4.71, all much higher than the general mean of 3.00. The values for the standard deviations were all less than 1.00, giving quite a close distribution. Again the means for the expectations were all higher than the actual experiences after the visit. The results of the analysis of the actual experience concerning the services received during and after the visit showed that here too all the five statements had means slightly above 3.00, the general mean, indicating satisfaction with the characteristics of the food served**.** The figures were from 3.23 and 3.84. All these indicate satisfaction with the services received and with the meals served. The differences between the expectations prior to the visit and the actual experiences during and after the visit were statistically significant at 0.05% significant level from the results of the Two-tailed Paired Samples Test which returned 0.000 at 95% Confidence Interval. It could be concluded that the respondents could not get the all their expectations fulfilled in terms of the food served, although the means may suggest they had some fair satisfaction. One thing to note in these results is that most frequent reasons for customers not returning to a catering or hospitality outlet include high rates or prices of service and products, inadequate menu, unpalatable food, unwholesome food (Berger, 1993; Ellis (2002). If the customers were satisfied with all the meals, then it is good for marketing, since it will make customers return to the establishments.

A critical examination of Table 2d reveals that the means of the overall expectations and actual experiences during and after the visits and standard deviations of customers' overall expectations and actual experiences being .32 and 3.48, re also both above the general mean of 3.00. The expectations prior to the visit were high as expected, with means from 4.02 to 4.49 from the five statements. Four of the statements on actual experiences after the service had means between 3.51 to 3.71, higher than the general mean of 3.00. The only statement that had a mean of 2.86, with a standard deviation of 1.10 was 'My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable'. Inspite of this, the customers admitted that the establishment's service met their expectations and were ready to recommend the catering establishments to their friends and business associates. Satisfied customers not only continue to transact business with the establishment but they also tell their friends and others about their positive experience. Customers' needs can be very specific or very vague as stated by Berger (2009) and definitely, not all of the customers' expectations can be

satisfied. The results of the Two-tailed Paired Samples Test once more returned 0.000 at 95% Confidence Interval, meaning that the differences between the expectations prior to the visit and the actual experiences during and after the visit were statistically significant at 0.05% significant level. All these indicate that the respondents viewed the services received in the establishments as fairly satisfactory.

The data in Table 3 reveal the following: i). The results of the *independent t-tests* used to determine whether the differences between males and females on all the statements pertaining to their overall expectations of catering services prior to the visit to the establishments were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. The table also indicates that the ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different marital status and educational levels on all the five statements were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. However, the ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different ages and positions on two of the five statements, which were: The establishment's service meets my expectations ($p = .005$) and 'Services rendered is worth every money paid' ($p = 0 .025$) were significant at p of 0.05.

Age: A post-hoc was conducted to find out which groups were responsible for the significant differences. The post-hoc tests revealed that the differences between the means of two groups were found to be responsible for the significant differences in two of the statements. These were: i) On the statement 'The establishment's service meets my expectations' the differences between those aged between 28 and 37 and those aged between 48 and 57 years a p value of 0.001 and ii) the differences between those aged 38 and 47 between those aged between 48 and 57 years was 0.005 both at $p = 0.05$. On the statement 'Services rendered is worth every money paid' ($p = 0 .025$), the post-hoc analysis on age revealed that the differences between those aged i). between 18 and 27 years and those aged between 28 and 37 years; ii). those aged between 28 and 37 and those between 38 and 47 years and ii). those aged between 38 and 47 and those aged between 48 and 57 years were found to be the groups which were responsible for the significant differences. The p values obtained for the post-hoc were 0.026, 0.008 and 0.003 respectively.

Position: The One-Way ANOVA test on the differences between respondents of different positions in the university also revealed that two statements out of the five were statistically significant. These were: i). 'My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable' with a p value of 0.002 and ii). 'To be able to repeat or return to this catering establishment' with a p value of 0.011. The post-hoc tests on the differences between the means of respondents with various positions in the university also indicate that i). 'My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable', the differences between i). The junior staff and students ($p = 0.023$), ii). Students and senior staff ($p= 0.010$) and iii). Students and senior members ($p = 0.001$) were significant at p value of 0.005.

Concerning the statement 'To be able to repeat or return to this catering establishment', the differences came from within the junior staff and senior members ($p = 0.004$) and students and senior members ($p = 0.003$) at 0.05 significance level.

The data in Table 3 reveal the following: i). The results of the *independent t-test* used to determine whether the differences

between males and females on their overall expectations and actual experiences of catering services received were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. The table also indicate that the ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different marital status and educational levels were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. However, the ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different ages and positions were statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. The values obtained were 0.023 and 0.050 significance levels respectively. For the post-hoc analysis on age, the differences between those aged between 18 and 27 years and those aged between 28 and 37 years were found to be the groups which were responsible for the significant differences. The post-hoc test on position of the respondents in their various establishments also indicated that the differences between the junior staff and all the groups, being students, senior staff and senior members were significant at of 0.024, 0.051 and 0.010 significance levels respectively. The finding on gender influences on expectations and experiences is contrary to the findings of Kuruvilla, Joshi and Shah (2009), Helgesen and Nesset (2010), and Melnyk, Van Osselaer and Bijmolt (2009), who found females and males to have significant differences in their perceptions and expectations. Differences between customers of different marital status were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level, and confirms that the relationship between marital status and expectations of customers could vary as Genre-Grandpierre (2015) found out. The finding on educational levels were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level On education, research found higher level s of education to be an important factor that influences the expectations of customers (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001), while Kim and Lough (2007) revealed that people with tertiary education exert an important influence on the overall perception of service quality. The respondents in this study had relatively high levels of education and that might have accounted for the differences not being significant. The ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different ages and positions were statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. The finding on age supports Hagan's (2015) finding of significant differences between perception and expectation levels of customers of various age groups. The positions in this study go with income levels, thus the Junior staff were of lower income levels and a number of them had high number of dependants and so it is not surprising that the differences between the groups were significant. Fraikue (2014) revealed from his study that unemployed or low income earners had higher expectations than the highly paid customers and Genre-Grandpierre (2015) investigated the impact of employment status on customer expectations based on their buying decisions.

Summary

The main objective of the study was to investigate the quality of customer service in catering establishments in and around the University of Cape Coast. The targeted population for the study comprised customers of who dine at least once a week in from the small and medium hotels, and restaurants in and around the University of Cape Coast. Questionnaires, comprising closed-ended items were used to elicit information from 200 respondents at the premises. The data collected was coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Services and Solutions (SPSS).

Summary of the key findings

a. Most of the respondents (60.5%) were aged between 18 and 49years. The remaining 39.5% were between the ages of 39 and 59 years. The percentage of females was 56.5 and the males formed 43.5%.

b. About half (50.5%) had never married, 42.5% were married and only (14.0%) were either divorced, separated or widowed. the divorced.

c. On the level of education, there were 92 (46.0%) undergraduates, and 57 (28.5%) had postgraduate certificates.

i. Customers' expectations and actual experiences on appearance and behaviour of staff

a. Means for all the 11 statements on customers' expectations on appearance and behaviour of staff were between 3.96 and 4.62. On the other hand, the means for 10 of the statements on the actual experience during and after the service were between 3.40 and 3.94. All of these were higher than the general mean of 3.00.

b. The statement 'Enthusiasm on part of staff in their tone voice' was the only statement with a mean of 2.82.below the general mean of 3.00.

ii. Customers' expectations and actual experiences on characteristics of the premises, equipment and tools

a. On customers' expectations and actual experiences on characteristics of the premises, equipment and tools, the means for the expectations prior to the visits were between 4.09 and 4.63. Three of the five statements had means 3.12, 3.16 and 3.88 respectively, also above the general mean of 3.00.

b. Two statements 'The dining equipment is modern and user friendly' and 'Appropriate and adequate cutlery, plates and glasses are used for the right meal service' had means (2.35 and 2.80) were both below 3.00.

iii. Customers' expectations and actual experiences of characteristics of the food served

a. All the five statements for the expectations prior to the visit were high, between 4.41 and 4.71, while the actual experiences during and after the service had means between 3.26 and 3.76, all above 3.00. The figures were from 3.23 and 3.84. All these indicate satisfaction with the services received and with the meals served.

iv. Customers' overall expectations and actual experiences

a. The means of the expectations prior to the visit ranged from 4.02 to 4.49, all higher than the general mean of 3.00. Four of the statements on actual experiences after the service had means higher than the general mean of 3.00. The only statement that had a mean of 2.86, with a standard deviation of 1.10 was 'My overall staying at this catering to be very valuable'.

Conclusions

a. From these findings, it can be seen that the respondents were highly educated adults and so they understood the items and knew what responses they had to give.

b. On the whole it can be concluded that the respondents had very high expectations prior to their visits on all the four aspects of service quality indicators, which were: 1.00. Appearance and behaviour of staff, 2. Characteristics of the premises, equipment and tools; 3 Characteristics of the food served and 4. Customers' overall evaluation. Their expectations were not surprising considering their age and high educational backgrounds. However, not all of the customers' expectations could be satisfied.

c. Their expectations were not fully met, as indicated by the statistically significant differences at 0.05% significant level between their expectations prior to their visits and the actual services received during and after their visits at from the paired t-tests. However, the means of the actual experiences after the visits were all above the general mean of 3.00, indicating satisfaction with the services received from the selected catering establishments.

d. The respondents were not satisfied with i. 'Enthusiasm on part of staff in their tone voice; ii 'The dining equipment and inappropriate, inadequate cutlery, plates and glasses that were not used for the right meal.

e. Although the customers thought their overall stay at the catering establishments was not very valuable' they admitted that the establishment's service met their expectations and were ready to recommend the catering establishments to their friends and business associates, probable because the customers were satisfied with all the meals.

f. All the results of the Two-tailed Paired Samples Test returned 0.000 at 95% Confidence Interval, indicating the differences between customer expectations and actual experiences were significant statistically. The results of the *independent t-test* showed that the differences between males and females on their overall expectations and actual experiences of catering services received were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. The ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different marital status and educational levels were not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. However, the ANOVA tests on differences between customers of different ages and positions were 0.023 and 0.050 indicating that the differences were statistically significant at 0.05 significance level.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions the following recommendations have been made to help improve service delivery in the catering establishments in the University of Cape Coast and its environs:

a. Though customers are generally happy about service delivery in catering establishments in and around the university community, management and staff should constantly train and educate themselves to be abreast with modern trends of providing quality service.

b. Staff must constantly be trained on how best to communicate and use god channel to transmit message and also improve the level and the tone of voice.

c. Satisfied customers not only continue to transact business with the establishment but they also tell their friends and others about the positive. In view of this,

the dining equipment tools should be appropriate, adequate used for the right meal.

d. In order to improve service delivery management should ensure variations of meals on the menu to enable customers to make choices to meet their taste. Management should also endeavour to ensure that meals are worth the price at which they are being sold.

e. Suggestion box should be placed at vantage point in the restaurants to enable customers comment on the actual experience of service delivery.

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