TAFE Students' perspective about managing customer service: a quantitative analysis

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Abstract: *The aim of the research was to investigate the level of quality customer service of the restaurant in order to deal with its current problems and achieve its target. Data was collected using an online questionnaire. It was distributed to 20 randomly selected customers. All the customers were selected from technical and further education (TAFE) institutes who were studying at hospitality department. The survey requested the level of satisfaction of customers with service, food and beverage quality, atmosphere, music, cleanliness of restaurant, and other issues related to presentation as well as customers' perceptions. The survey results showed product knowledge, communication skill of staff; food and beverage quality and waiting time which were the areas of most concern. The significance of this study is to address the current problems and will achieve long-term goals. This study has been concluded with few recommendations and guide for future research in this paradigm.*
Keywords: *Customer service, improving knowledge and skills, quality food.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the restaurant sale has decreased dramatically and the number of customer complains also has increase continuously [1] Previous research found that many related factors were embedded to cause for increasing customers complains [2]; [3]. Therefore, the restaurant's management needs to do something to deal with this situation to get the restaurant back on its track. In order to improve this unexpected situation, a survey based study conducted to investigate the reasons and its implying causes so that innovative actions could be made. This study was about restaurant quality customer service which was based on a small 50 seat dining and takeaway restaurant. The main purpose of this report was to find out the following research questions:

(i)   What is the current status of the restaurant?
(ii)   What are the areas that the restaurant needs to improve?
(iii)   Find out the customers' expectation so that the restaurant can meet their expectation?

II.   Methodology

This is a quantitative study based on a questionnaire. The main aim of the questionnaire was to collect feedback from customers' dining experience in order to improve the restaurant service. An online survey had been conducted to collect the information, customers' opinions about the overall quality of the restaurant's customer service, particularly focusing on restaurant service and quality of served food. In order to archive, the online survey had been circulated and data had been collected because it was convenient and was an easy approach to collect the information directly from the customers.

Twenty customers from the participated restaurant were randomly selected to participate in the survey. A survey link was provided in a piece of paper. All the customers were participated voluntary in this study. There was 20 feedback collected on the 1st September 2013.
Survey monkey tool was used, 10 questionnaires includes the aspects of:

- Customer's needs and expectations
- Product quality
- Level of service
- Environment and ambience

Demography Information: Defining target market is an important factor to the success of the restaurant business. A target market is characterized by age, sex, geography, and economic classification. According to Brandon O'Dell [4] "A target market IS the portion of the population *most likely* to buy what you are selling. A target market is not the portion of the population *you want* to sell your food to". The survey results showed the demographic information, restaurant target groups as following.

Gender:	65% female, 35% male;
Age group:	18- 40 years old
Occupation:	50% Students, 25% self-employees, 10% professional

Description of Participated Restaurant: The name of participated restaurant was "A" that name was used as a symbolic name to keep it anonymous. It was a small family restaurant which serves and deliveries Persian cuisine and pizza. It was located at CBD, Sydney, NSW 2065. The business's main products were Persian food like chips, kebabs, authentic pots dishes and pizzas. The restaurant's services were dine in, takeaway, or delivery. It was a 50-seat restaurant with 30 seats inside and 20 outdoor seating. There were totally ten staff in which the owner was also the manager, three chefs, one kitchen hand, five part-time and casual front of house staff and delivery staff.

The restaurant customers were mainly local people. Mostly students and workers who were working around were expected to have food during the lunchtime. On the other hand, at the weekend and dinner time, the customers were mostly local people who would like to enjoy a nice dinner, delicious food and nice atmosphere with their friends and family. Therefore, the restaurant's targeted groups was mainly: (i). Local people, (ii). Students and (iii). Workers.

III. Findings

The below sections present the findings and relevant recommendations. The first problem was "How often do you dine with us?"
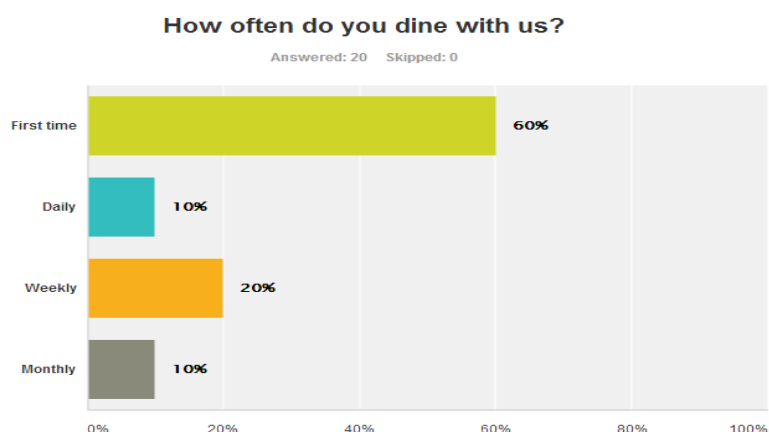

Fig.1: Frequency of having dine.

The analysis (see "Fig.1") revealed that 60% participants dined at the restaurant for the first time. 10% of the remainder came daily, 20% weekly and 10% monthly. The study reveals that most of the customers dine at the restaurant or take away the first time which is six times more than daily and monthly customers and three times more than weekly customers. In addition, the number of daily and monthly customers is same but less than the number of weekly customers. According to this survey, there were 40% repeat customers. That is a positive result. What the restaurant needs to focus on is to turn first time customers into repeat customers.

Therefore, the restaurant should have strategies; incentives which encourage customers to come back. Strategies should include improving and consistently providing quality food and service. Ideas such as loyalty vouchers should be investigated and analysed for cost/ benefit.
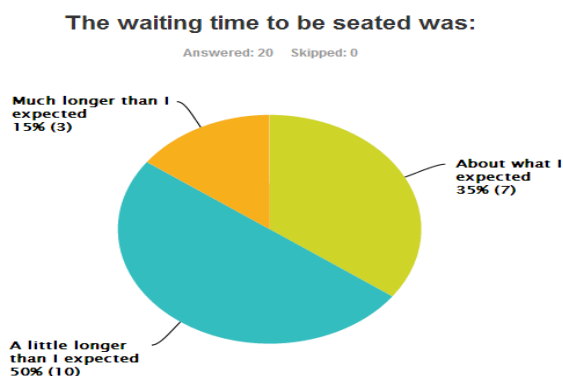

Fig.2: Waiting time to get the order

The pie chart (see "Fig.2") shows the percentage of customers' satisfaction on waiting time. There were 15% of participants responded that the waiting time was much longer than they expected. There were up to 50% of customers who thought the time waiting to be seated was a bit longer than what they expected whereas, for 35% of responses, the time they were waiting to be seated matched their expectation. Therefore, majority of the customers (65%) reported that the waiting time after ordering the food was quite longer than their expectation. This could mean that the staff's attentiveness was not high, or there were not enough tables and chairs, or the customers did not have a booking, or the restaurant was busy and staffing levels did not match the number of customers, or customer expectations were too optimistic.

What the restaurant could do is to train staff to be more attentive to arriving customers. Recruiting more casual staff for busy hours and at the weekend is also should be considered. The restaurant could improve their booking system to encourage customers to book in advance.

The Food/ Beverages

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Average Rating
The food was served hot and fresh	15% 3	60% 12	20% 4	5% 1	20	2.85
The quality of food was excellent	15% 3	40% 8	35% 7	10% 2	20	2.60
The food was very tasty and flavoursome	15% 3	55.00% 11	15% 3	15% 3	20	2.70
The quality of beverages was excellent	10% 2	40% 8	40% 8	10% 2	20	2.50
Overall, the food & beverage were value for money	5% 1	50% 10	30% 6	15% 3	20	2.45

Fig.3: Quality of food and beverage

The above chart and table (see "Fig.3") show the level of customers' satisfaction with food and beverage. There were a large percentage of participants expressed their dissatisfaction on food and beverage quality which was 45%, and 50%, respectively. There were 70% of participants who stated that the food was tasty and flavoursome whereas 30% had opposite opinion. Food should always be served hot and fresh. It is the very basic and expected requirement for improving the quality of served food, which the restaurant needs to pay attention. However, the figure 3 shows that 25% of participant was not happy with their food temperature and freshness where as most of the customers (75%) were happy with that. 25% customer's feedback needs to be considered seriously in order to improve food quality, as it is related to the food quality (hot and fresh). Another very core expectation is to ensure all foods and beverages are at the best of quality and value. However, there were 45% of participants said that the food and beverage were not value for money. It indicates that the restaurant has not achieved its target. There should be better coordinate/ cooperate between the kitchen team and the front of house team to ensure that food must always be served immediately when it is ready. Shortage of staff could be one of the reasons which need to be considered.
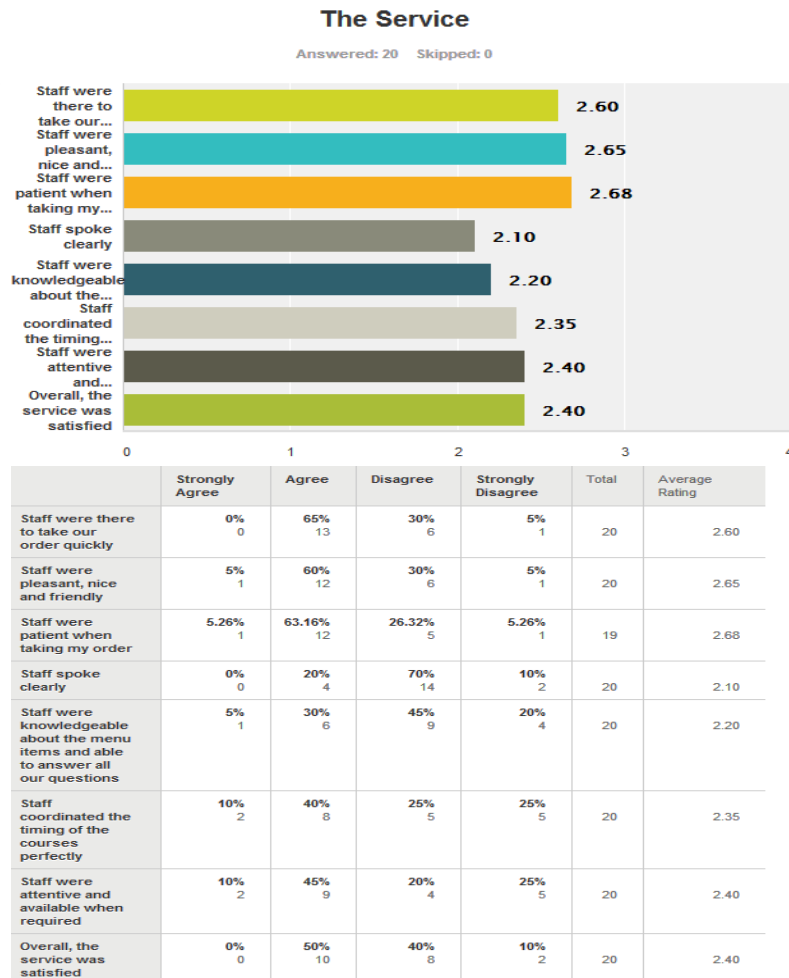
The Service

Answered: 20   Skipped: 0

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Average Rating
Staff were there to take our order quickly	0% 0	65% 13	30% 6	5% 1	20	2.60
Staff were pleasant, nice and friendly	5% 1	60% 12	30% 6	5% 1	20	2.65
Staff were patient when taking my order	5.26% 1	63.16% 12	26.32% 5	5.26% 1	19	2.68
Staff spoke clearly	0% 0	20% 4	70% 14	10% 2	20	2.10
Staff were knowledgeable about the menu items and able to answer all our questions	5% 1	30% 6	45% 9	20% 4	20	2.20
Staff coordinated the timing of the courses perfectly	10% 2	40% 8	25% 5	25% 5	20	2.35
Staff were attentive and available when required	10% 2	45% 9	20% 4	25% 5	20	2.40
Overall, the service was satisfied	0% 0	50% 10	40% 8	10% 2	20	2.40

Fig. 4: customers' satisfaction on quality of customer service

"Fig.4" exhibits the level of customers' satisfaction on quality of customer service. The overall responses showed that most participants in the survey were not satisfied with the service they received from the restaurant's staff. It is obvious that customers were not happy with the level of staffs' knowledge of the menu items and the ability of staff in communicating menu details. There were 80% of participated customers who stated that the staff did not speak clearly. The expectation of respondents that staff in a Persian restaurant all speak perfect English, might be misplaced (Australia is considered a multicultural society). However, 65% of participants thought the staff lacked product knowledge. This is an issue that must be addressed by improved training. 50% of participants were unsatisfied with the timing of courses. It could be the problem of the kitchen that they did not aware of the entire course. There might be required a computerising system which could help them to transmit the order quicker and more accurate. It becomes a bit more positive in the aspect of staff personality and patience and speed to take orders. There were 65%; 68.42%, and 65% of participants agreed that staff were friendly, patient, quick in taking orders, respectively.

Overall, 50% of participated customers were happy with the service provided. Therefore, half of the customers were not happy with the service which is a significant number of total customers. As a result, the restaurant needs to take necessary steps to improve the quality of customer service. In order to improve this situations, there might be two solutions: one of the solutions could be hiring new skilled, professional staff which meets the requirement of the customer standard and another could be training staff to the expected level. Besides, employing a computerised system might be a solution if the restaurant budget allows it.
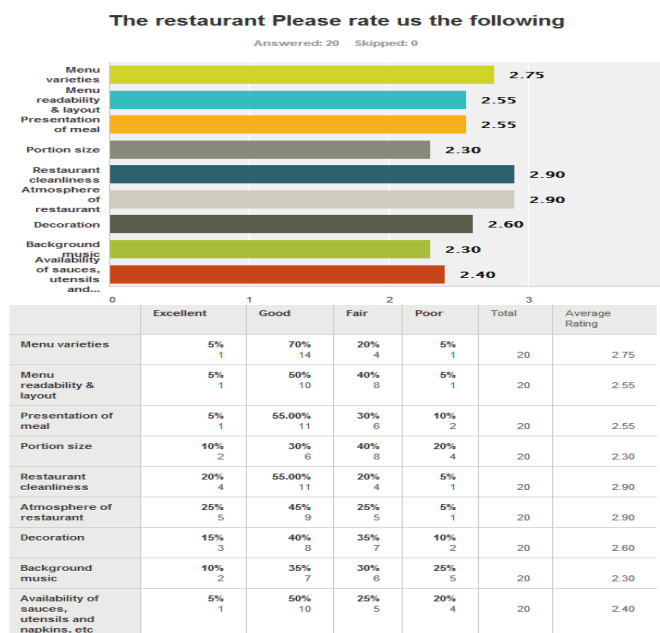
The restaurant Please rate us the following
Answered: 20   Skipped: 0

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Total	Average Rating
Menu varieties	5% 1	70% 14	20% 4	5% 1	20	2.75
Menu readability & layout	5% 1	50% 10	40% 8	5% 1	20	2.55
Presentation of meal	5% 1	55.00% 11	30% 6	10% 2	20	2.55
Portion size	10% 2	30% 6	40% 8	20% 4	20	2.30
Restaurant cleanliness	20% 4	55.00% 11	20% 4	5% 1	20	2.90
Atmosphere of restaurant	25% 5	45% 9	25% 5	5% 1	20	2.90
Decoration	15% 3	40% 8	35% 7	10% 2	20	2.60
Background music	10% 2	35% 7	30% 6	25% 5	20	2.30
Availability of sauces, utensils and napkins, etc	5% 1	50% 10	25% 5	20% 4	20	2.40

Fig.5: Customers satisfaction

The responses show (see "Fig. 5") most customers were relatively satisfied. This is a positive result. The questions covered a wide range of subjects. 25% of respondents objected to the background music. 20% of them objected to the portion size and the same percentage to the availability of sauces, utensils and napkins. If they were regular customers who were not happy with the portion size, then the restaurant needs to look at the consistency of portion and presentation. Looking at individual responses; it is clear that all the participants who were not happy with the portion size were first time customers. It is very important to consider this matter because first time customers can be potential become loyalty customers. Quality customer service is to obtain and retain customers' loyalty. Sauces, utensils and napkins need to be checked always to ensure it is always available for customers. While 25% of participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the music, 75% were happy with it. Music is a difficult issue to address. These issues aside respondents generally gave a positive response to the survey questions. 75% were happy with the menu variety and 20% thought it was fair. Most of participants liked the cleanliness and atmosphere of the restaurant, 75% and 70%, respectively. Therefore, the restaurant should keep what it is doing well and even try to improve it better to meet the increasing demand of the market.
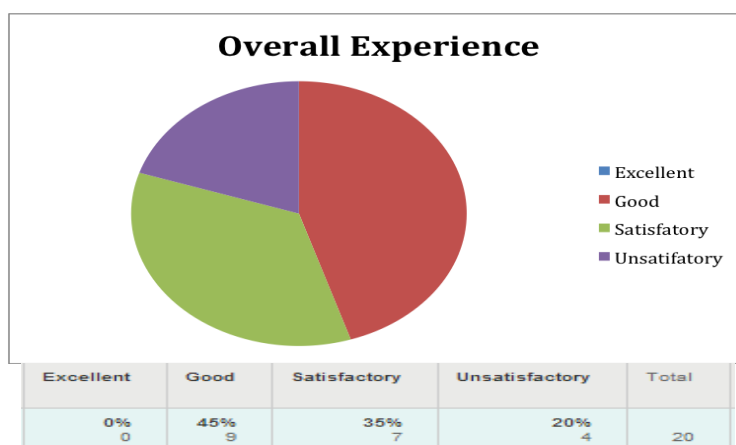

Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Total
0% 0	45% 9	35% 7	20% 4	20

Fig.6: Overall experience of participated customers

The pie chart (see "Fig.6") illustrates the overall experience of participated customers at 'A' restaurant. There are 45% participant stated that their experience was good. 35% of them were satisfied with their overall meal whereas 20% were not satisfied with what they got over their meal. This result reveals that majority of the participated customers (45%+35%=80%) were satisfied with their experience in the restaurant. On the contrary, 20% of unsatisfactory means the restaurant still needs to improve service and meals, to achieve its targets.

IV. Recommendations

This study revealed the following general recommendations:

Order should be served quickly so that the waiting time will be reduced. Staff needs to undergo proper training to gain product knowledge. Besides the trainee staff (new staff or the staff who had lack of product knowledge) can form the peer group with experienced staff to improve their knowledge and skills related to restaurant overall service.

Regarding service quality, it is recommended that the restaurant managers provide the necessary training on for improving service quality and communication skills. Regarding food quality and price, monitoring system would be one strategy to ensure fresh and quality food. Besides, a new seasonal menu is reviewed and implemented as the strategy to reduce cost and serving proper dish for the customers' satisfaction. In addition, they can investigate prices of rival restaurants and take them into account in their pricing strategies

The management could provide a better, clearer menu, describe on the menu what it is and what will they get, to change customer's expectations, to make it clear what is offered. For example, Fillet steak, wrapped with bacon (200g), etc. Moreover, the restaurant could have a feedback form to find out more information about so that the management could learn from others' experience.

V. Conclusion

Word-of-mouth is an effective way to expand the restaurant business and perhaps it does not cost anything. What the restaurant can do to bring more customers is to first satisfied current customers with quality food and service [5]. This study is useful for identifying possible areas of improvement for the restaurant business. It also helps to improve the quality of food as well as its customer service could be much better than before. Quantitative research is used in his study. While quantitative research has many strengths in research, one weakness has been discovered in this study is that the participant might not honest with their answers because more than one of the questionnaires showed inconsistency in answering questions. The survey answers showed that they were regular customers but extremely dissatisfied with every aspect of the restaurant.

In future surveys, cross-question analysis should be included; however it costs money so it was not done in this analysis. Further questions should be included in the survey to clarify reasons for the customers' answers such as the reason for not coming back: is it because they were not happy with the food, service? Or because they were tourists, etc. Moreover, this study based on the small number of sample size from where might not be generalised the overall restaurants quality of food and customers satisfaction. In order to generalised this findings, a larger sample will be proposed for the future study.

Acknowledgements

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