

Canteen Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: A Case Study of a Private College in Kathmandu

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Abstract

The paper examines the quality of the service of the canteen and satisfaction level of students from the canteen operating within a private college of Kathmandu. Hence, the study conducted the survey among the 106 students studying different courses at the sampled college. The study used a mean analysis and a correlation coefficient as a data analytical tool. The study revealed a moderate to below-average satisfaction among students regarding the canteen services. The study concluded that tangibility significantly influences student satisfaction while physical facilities, equipment, and appearance are other key factors. Responsiveness and reliability also made an impact on student satisfaction towards college canteen services. However, reliability, empathy, and assurance have weaker impact on students' satisfaction as well, indicating even their importance in college canteen services.

Key Words: Canteen, college, satisfaction, students, SERVQUAL

Introduction and Study Objectives

A canteen is a place where food is served and eaten, where different snack and drink products are sold. A college utilises a canteen to meet the food and nutritional needs of its students for them to have the energy to accomplish the task that they would do for the day (Galabo, 2019).

The service quality of a college canteen can be assessed by evaluating several key factors: food quality including taste, freshness, and hygiene; service speed and efficiency; staff behaviour, focusing on friendliness and professionalism; cleanliness and ambience, such as the dining area's cleanliness and comfort; menu variety and pricing, ensuring a range of affordable options; availability of facilities like seating and condiments; accessibility, including proximity to key areas and considerations for people with disabilities; and the presence of feedback mechanisms to address customer suggestions and complaints (Galabo, 2019; Raya & Bajracharya (2023).

Each organisation aims to set themselves apart in the constantly changing global environment. Accordingly, attaining customer happiness becomes the top objective in the highly competitive hospitality sector, according to Lee et al. (2016). However, food and beverage service providers must carefully analyse consumer needs, tastes, purchasing patterns, and price sensitivity to achieve this goal. Some cafeterias, though, are lacking in this area. Several obstacles that prevent university food service enterprises

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from providing outstanding customer service have been identified by [Mensah and Dei Mensah \(2018\)](#). These difficulties include things like space constraints, monotonous menus, uninspired food selections, and general shortcomings in facilities, service, and food quality. [Cano and Hijada II \(2024\)](#) implied that when the school's canteen increases its level of service quality, customer satisfaction will also increase.

In the context of Nepal, a study at a canteen operated in one of the community colleges found that the level of student satisfaction with the canteen is moderately satisfactory ([Raya & Bajracharya, 2023](#)). This implies that canteen quality still needs to be addressed for better service performance to its student customers. Similarly, [Rawal et al. \(2024\)](#) found that students found the canteen service level moderately satisfactory with a positive correlation between satisfaction and tangibility along with empathy, indicating a positive relationship. Therefore, there are concerns regarding the quality of the service delivered by the canteens operated within the premises of the Nepalese colleges. Hence, this paper tries to get an insight of service quality from the viewpoints of students at one of the private colleges operating at Kathmandu.

Review of Literature

The review of literature has been divided into theoretical and empirical review.

Theoretical Review

The theoretical review related to Service Quality: SERVQUAL has been presented in this section.

Service Quality-SERVQUAL

[Parasuraman et al. \(1985\)](#) developed a service quality model to understand how consumers perceive quality in organisations. They identified ten determinants of service quality, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, and understanding. These dimensions were regrouped into the SERVQUAL model, which includes tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy. Tangibility refers to physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel, assurance is knowledge and courtesy of employees, reliability is the ability to perform promised services reliably and accurately, responsiveness is the willingness to help customers, and empathy is the caring individualised attention provided by the firm.

SERVQUAL of Canteen

Students can enjoy a wide variety of fresh food selections when local area vendors frequently provide fresh food for the students' monthly menu ([Cohen et al., 2009](#)). The degree of satisfaction with the university cafeteria depends mostly on the quality of meals, diversity of food, food hygiene, food safety and environment ([Kim & Kim, 2004](#)). Cafeteria ambiance is influenced by seating arrangement, interior design quality, and background music, which

contribute to high dining satisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2009). Food packaging, plate size, design, lighting, and dining companions also influence the individual's immediate setting (Story et al., 2008). The design of the cafeteria environment influences consumer food choices and eating behaviours, promoting wellness, combating obesity, and complementing interventions. The physical setting also influences customers' perceptions of service quality (Hensley & Sulek, 2007; Norhati & Nur Hafisah, 2013; Raman & Chinniah, 2011; Wansink et al., 2001). Flegal et al. (2010) found relationships between food information, food quality, eating behaviour, eating environments, and food distribution environments.

Cafeteria atmosphere is influenced by seating arrangement, internal decorations, and ambient melodies, which contribute to higher gratification (Namkung & Jang, 2008). Factors like food packing, portion size, and lighting also impact the setting (Story et al., 2008). The physical environment also influences customers' perception of service quality (Hensley & Sulek, 2007; Norhati & Nur Hafisah, 2013). Flegal et al. (2010) shows connections between food information, quality, eating behaviours, dining situations, and food distribution settings. The atmosphere is an intangible component, including design, layout, interior design, colour scheme, textures, and food. The right atmosphere can enhance the food, service quality, and overall dining experience, directly impacting customer perception (Norhati & Hafisah, 2013; Raman & Chinniah, 2011). Kim et al. (2006) suggested different ways to improve the utilisation rate of the student cafeteria among college students, such as offering Asian, Mexican, and Italian food in a package menu in a university food-service centre.

Empirical Review

The empirical review related to Service Quality: SERVQUAL of the canteen operating within the educational institutions has been presented in this section. The reviews are done to find out the variables relevant for the study and the research gap the prevails in the respective topic:

Chang et al. (2014) study found that food quality significantly impacts student satisfaction in university cafeterias, outperforming staff effectiveness, pricing equity, and ambiance level.

El-Said and Fathy (2015) found below-average student satisfaction with service aspects, with every service attribute significantly affecting overall student happiness. Similarly, Garg and Kumar (2017) investigated the link between the different service characteristics that have an influence on customer satisfaction in university cafeteria food services. The study reveals that various quality parameters significantly affect staff and student satisfaction at the university cafeteria, with customer satisfaction positively correlated. Additionally, respondents' loyalty is significantly influenced by the cafeteria's pricing.

Czarniecka-Skubina et al. (2019) analysed consumer choices and service quality in university canteens in Warsaw. The respondents' assessments of student canteens did not align with the canteen's, suggesting consumers may not be aware of the quality of services or proper staff conduct, including food production and hygiene standards. Full-course dinner customers were more critical of the catering service.

Smith et al. (2019) discovered that students' satisfaction with on-campus food-service operations and dining frequency is positively influenced by meal quality, ambience, value for money, food and beverage options, and service quality.

Galabo (2019) found moderate student satisfaction with somewhat satisfactory canteen services. A positive correlation was found between student happiness and cafeteria service quality, with tangibleness, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy being the most significant factors. Similarly, Cha and Seo (2019) found that menu, flavor, cost, and cleanliness significantly impact student satisfaction in university cafeterias. Age, allowance, and gender were also examined, with students' preferences mainly influenced by their allowance.

Moorthy et al. (2020) examines students' satisfaction towards the service quality of cafeterias in higher education institutions located in the State of Selangor in Malaysia. The findings demonstrated that the only element that significantly correlates with student satisfaction is the assurance of the educational institutions; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and pricing value do not significantly correlate.

Misiran et al. (2022) found that service quality and menu variety significantly impact students' satisfaction. They recommended that college cafeterias improve their services. Raya and Bajracharya (2023) found that students' satisfaction with the canteen was moderately satisfactory, with an overall mean rating of 3.28. To enhance service, the canteen's quality needs to be addressed, as the overall satisfaction rating was 3.28 points.

Rawal et al. (2024) indicated that students were generally satisfied with the canteen's service, which they considered to be moderately satisfactory. The degree of canteen services and student happiness were shown to be significantly positively correlated, indicating certain factors like tangibility and empathy that have a significant impact on this relationship. Similarly, a study at the State University of Northern, Mindanao Baguio and Naelga (2024) found a strong positive correlation between food service characteristics and patron satisfaction in cafeteria services, including food and beverage quality, service quality, location quality, and pricing and value, indicating a positive relationship between these factors.

A study by Tang (2024) found that students at Jie Yang Campus of Guangdong University Technology are more satisfied with the cafeteria's quality than the cuisine, with female students also showing higher satisfaction. The study also found that there is a need for improvement in food pricing, flavor, and diversity. Similarly, Msendo (2024) found that students' expectations were more important than their perceptions, indicating unsatisfactory overall service quality.

Cano and Hijada II (2024) found high service quality and customer satisfaction in the school canteen, with no significant difference by sex. However, there was a significant difference by year level and category. Tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy significantly influenced customer satisfaction. The quantitative result suggests that increasing service quality leads to increased customer satisfaction.

Research Gap

There are countable studies done on the SERVQUAL of the canteen operated within the college and university operating in Nepal. The studies are done on the community colleges operating at the one in Kathmandu Valley and one outside. Hence, this paper tries to fill up the gap by doing the study on one of the private colleges operating affiliated with Tribhuvan University.

Research Methods

The paper deals with the opinions of the students on the service quality of the canteen operating at one of the private colleges, Asian School of management & Technology (??give name of the college here) in Kathmandu. Hence, a descriptive research design has been used in the paper to gather information to make accurate predictions about a particular problem. The paper has adopted descriptive statistics, mainly mean value and a correlation coefficient to see the relationship of customer satisfaction level with the SERVQUAL of the sampled canteen.

The paper considered all the bachelor level students studying at the private college operating in Kathmandu district. A total of around 1500 students in morning and day shifts in different courses of information and technology-IT and management of Tribhuvan University. Among them, considering the convenience sampling technique the paper has considered 106 students, 41 female and remaining male. studying different courses at Asian School of Management and Technology, Gongabun, Ring Road, Kathmandu.

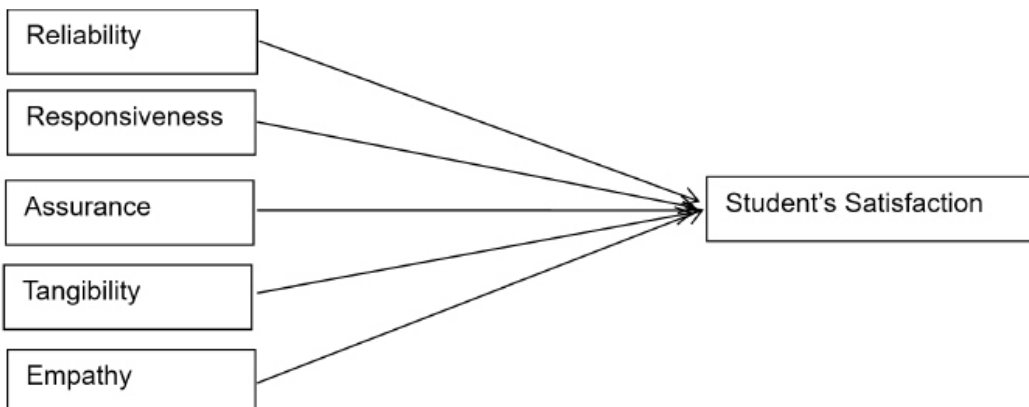
The paper has adopted the following conceptual framework:

Figure1

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables

Dependent Variable



Note. Adapted from [Galabo, 2019](#)

The sample size is determined considering 70 percent confidence level with five percent margin of error. The respective college is selected for easy availability of the respondent and convenience of the researcher.

The paper has followed the theoretical concept of service quality (SERVQUAL) to get opinions from the college students. The constructs are adopted from [Galabo \(2019\)](#) and modified to suit the Nepalese context, were prepared using SERVQUAL criteria and underwent a pilot test to ensure reliability. The reliability test was done following a Cronbach's Alpha with following result:.

Table 1

Reliability Test Result

Constructs	Initial Items	Dropped Items	Alpha Value
Reliability	5	Nil	0.912
Responsiveness	5	Nil	0.909
Assurance	5	2	0.928
Tangibility	5	Nil	0.951
Empathy	5	1	0.927
Student's Satisfaction	10	1	0.960

A total of 4 items are dropped from three different constructs of paper. All the values of alpha show high reliability for each construct.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The section elaborates the data compiled from the field survey.

Respondents' Profile

The table below shows the details of the profile of the respondents:

Table 2

Respondents' Profile

Sex	No.	Age Group	No.	Degree	No.
Male	62 (58.5%)	Below 20	28 (26.4%)	BIM	25 (23.6%)
Female	44 (41.5%)	20 and above	78 (73.6%)	BBM	11 (10.4%)
				BCA	47 (44.3%)
				B.Sc. CSIT	23 (21.7%)
				Total	106 (100.0%)

Note. Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 demonstrates diversity in age and degree programs, with a higher proportion of males and individuals aged 20 and above. The participants are predominantly enrolled in BCA programs.

Opinions on Reliability

This dimension is about delivering promised services dependably and accurately. For a college canteen, reliability could involve consistently offering food options as advertised, ensuring there are no shortages, and maintaining the quality of food and service. If the canteen often runs out of certain food items or fails to meet quality standards, it negatively affects the perception of reliability. The opinions forwarded on the reliability of canteen service of the college by the sampled students have been tabulated below:

Table 3

Opinions on Reliability

Items	Mean
Keeping canteen staff cheerful and kind all the time.	3.38
Having an attitude to entertain the students.	3.22
Showing sincere interest to the students.	3.15
Keeping service accurately.	3.02
Keeping canteen staff never bust to respond to their students' request.	2.97
Keeping service dependently.	2.95
Overall Average	3.11

Note. Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 provides an analysis of students' opinions on the reliability of canteen services. An overall average of 3.11 suggests that students find the reliability of canteen services moderate but not outstanding. Students appreciate or value cheerful and kind behavior from canteen staff. It suggests this aspect is somewhat satisfactory but not exceptional. The positive attitude and friendliness of staff are relatively stronger aspects of reliability. There is dissatisfaction with the consistency of service delivery, response to requests, and service dependability.

Opinions on Responsiveness

This reflects the willingness of employees to help and provide prompt service. In a college canteen, responsiveness would include factors such as staff's ability to address customer complaints quickly, as well as the speed at which students are served, especially during peak hours. The opinions forwarded on the responsiveness of canteen service of the college by the sampled students have been tabulated below:

Table 4

Opinions on Responsiveness

Items	Mean
Having the heart to willingly serve and help the students.	3.27
The canteen staff never bust to respond to their students' request.	2.97
Responding to students' needs.	2.96
Providing prompt service.	2.91
Providing good quality service.	2.74
Overall Average	2.97

Note. Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 indicates that students recognise and appreciate the willingness of staff to help, though there is still room for improvement. The data also indicate concerns about responsiveness, particularly regarding staff availability and attentiveness to student needs. Students are dissatisfied with the promptness and perceived quality of service delivery, which are critical aspects of responsiveness. The overall average indicates that students perceive responsiveness as below satisfactory on average, suggesting the need for improvement in this area.

Opinions on Assurance

This dimension involves the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to instil confidence. Canteen staff who are knowledgeable about the menu, food safety standards, and dietary options help foster a sense of trust. Well-trained staff can ensure that food is prepared according to health standards and that students feel comfortable with the service. The opinions forwarded on the assurance of canteen service of the college by the sampled students have been tabulated below:

Table 5

Opinions on Assurance

Items	Mean
Showing courtesy and politeness.	3.57
Showing positive behaviours towards students.	3.42
Conveying trust and confidence.	3.39
Overall Average	3.46

Note. Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 indicates that respondents perceive courtesy and politeness as a relatively stronger attribute, though the score suggests moderate satisfaction rather than strong

assurance. The overall average implies moderate levels of assurance as perceived by the respondents. Although the ratings are close, there is scope for improvement, particularly in conveying trust and confidence.

Opinions on Tangibility

This dimension refers to the physical aspects of the service environment, such as cleanliness, the appearance of staff, and the condition of facilities. A canteen's cleanliness, the quality of its furniture, and the organisation of its food displays can influence perceptions of service quality. In a college canteen, reliability in this dimension may depend on consistent maintenance and upkeep. The opinions forwarded on the tangibility of canteen service of the college by the sampled students have been tabulated below:

Table 6

Opinions on Tangibility

Items	Mean
Assigning good canteen staffs.	2.75
Providing comfortable facilities in the college canteen.	2.58
Keeping the physical appearance of the college canteen neat and presentable.	2.56
Having complete and functional equipment in the 5 college canteen.	2.50
Keeping the canteen staff well-dressed and appearing neat.	2.34
Overall Average	2.54

Note. Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 reflects dissatisfaction among respondents regarding the physical and functional aspects of the college canteen. The overall average of 2.54 indicates that respondents generally view the tangible elements of the canteen as subpar. This points to a need for improvement in various aspects of the canteen experience. Respondents find the facilities and environment (e.g., cleanliness, comfort, and presentation) to be unsatisfactory. The perception of staff professionalism and hygiene appears to be a critical issue needing immediate attention.

Opinions on Empathy

Empathy refers to the provision of caring, individualised attention. In a college canteen, this could mean acknowledging special dietary needs, offering personalised service, or creating a welcoming environment. This dimension is especially important for students who may have specific food preferences or requirements. The opinions forwarded on the empathy of canteen service of the college by the students sampled have been tabulated below:

Table 7

Opinions on Empathy

Items	Mean
Showing kindness to students.	3.53
Being approachable and friendly to students.	3.43
Asking students in a nice and cheerful manner.	3.29
Showing concern or care for the students.	2.90
Overall Average	3.29

Note. *Field Survey, 2025*

Table 7 provides insights into how respondents perceive the institution's ability to understand and address student needs and emotions. Staff are seen as relatively approachable and friendly, but there is room for improvement in fostering stronger interpersonal connections. The average score indicates moderate satisfaction with the empathetic behaviours of the staff, but the relatively low score for 'showing concern or care' highlights an area for significant improvement. While empathy is rated moderately well overall, focusing on improving care and concern for students could lead to a more empathetic and supportive environment, which is essential for student satisfaction and engagement.

Opinions on Students' Satisfaction

Student satisfaction with college canteen services is a critical factor for the overall experience and well-being of students. A canteen serves as a vital part of student life, providing meals, snacks, and a social space. The satisfaction level of students is influenced by various aspects of the canteen service, including food quality, affordability, service speed, and overall atmosphere. The opinions forwarded on the satisfaction level of canteen service of the college by the sampled students have been tabulated below:

Table 8 shows an overall average of 2.50 indicates that students' satisfaction with the canteen is below average, suggesting areas for significant improvement. The canteen's location within college is rated as favourable to students, but it still falls short of satisfaction. Food affordability is slightly positive but not ideal for students. Cleanliness, product presentation, and sanitised utensils are slightly higher than the average but not satisfactory. Hygiene practices of personnel are the lowest, indicating a need for improvement. Students feel the canteen is poorly managed, possibly due to layout, service efficiency, or operational policies. Service efficiency is also a concern, as delayed service or lack of promptness is another concern. Ambiance is low, indicating dissatisfaction with lighting, seating arrangements, noise levels, or comfort. The most critical issue is the poor hygiene practices of staff, which can lead to health concerns and negatively impact students' satisfaction and trust in the canteen.

Table 8

Opinions on Students' Satisfaction

Items	Mean
The canteen is strategically situated in a place where it is accessible and convenient for all students.	2.75
The food in the canteen is affordable for the students.	2.69
The cleanliness of the canteen is well-maintained.	2.57
The products displayed in the canteen are presentable, clean, and contain the required nutritional values.	2.55
The utensils, tools, and equipment used in the canteen are sanitised or clean.	2.52
The canteen is well-organised and well-managed.	2.51
The canteen personnel entertain student customers promptly and without any delay.	2.48
The ambiance in the canteen is good and refreshing.	2.26
The canteen personnel wear hair nets and gloves to observe cleanliness in the preparation and handling of foods.	2.15
Overall Average	2.50

Note. *Field Survey, 2025*

Correlation Analysis

The table below elaborates the correlation values among the dependent and independent variables:

Table 9

Correlation Matrix

Constructs	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Tangibility	Empathy	Student Satisfaction
Reliability	1					
Responsiveness	+0.727** (0.000)	1				
Assurance	+0.734** (0.000)	+0.664** (0.000)	1			
Tangibility	+0.615** (0.000)	+0.716** (0.000)	+0.574** (0.000)	1		
Empathy	+0.693** (0.000)	+0.678** (0.000)	+0.759** (0.000)	+0.582** (0.000)	1	
Student's Satisfaction	+0.444** (0.000)	+0.612** (0.000)	+0.344** (0.000)	+0.788** (0.000)	+0.440** (0.000)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 shows that tangibility has the strongest impact (+0.788) on student satisfaction, suggesting that physical facilities, equipment, and appearance are key to enhancing satisfaction with the college canteen services. Similarly, responsiveness and reliability also play crucial roles in shaping satisfaction.

Assurance (+0.344) and empathy (+0.440) have relatively weaker direct impacts on satisfaction, though they strongly influence other constructs. This analysis highlights the importance of focusing on tangible aspects and responsive services to maximise student satisfaction.

As all the variables are seen positively correlated to each other, there is an issue of multicollinearity.

Conclusion and Implications

The study reveals moderate to below-average satisfaction among students regarding the canteen services. Students appreciate the canteen employees' cheerful and kind behaviours but are dissatisfied with consistency, dependability, and response to requests. Responsiveness is below satisfactory, indicating the need for quicker and more effective service. Assurance is perceived as courteous and polite but moderately satisfied with trust and confidence. Tangibility is the most dissatisfied area, with the canteen's physical environment, cleanliness, staff professionalism, and hygiene practices being particularly problematic. Empathy is perceived as approachable but needs improvement in showing more concern and care for students.

Overall, student satisfaction with the canteen is below average, with low hygiene standards impacting satisfaction and trust. Tangibility has the strongest influence on satisfaction, followed by responsiveness and reliability. Assurance and empathy have a weaker direct impact on satisfaction. However, all variables show positive correlations, suggesting that improvements in multiple areas can collectively enhance student satisfaction. Addressing these key areas can lead to substantial improvements in student satisfaction. For improvement, the focus should be on ensuring cleanliness and hygiene in food preparation and handling, enhancing service speed and organisation, creating a more welcoming and comfortable ambiance, and making the food more affordable while maintaining quality.

The study emphasises the importance of improving the physical environment, service consistency, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and hygiene in a school setting to enhance student satisfaction, service reliability, and overall staff performance, ultimately fostering better health standards and trust. Overall, focusing on the tangible aspects and improving service efficiency can significantly improve student satisfaction with the canteen.

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Conflict of interest

The author declared having no conflict of interest associated with this study.

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