



# Measuring restaurant service quality in East London, South Africa: A comparison of restaurant customer expectations and perceptions

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure service quality in restaurants in East London, South Africa. The aims were to: (a) assess customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality and to (b) establish the significance of difference between perceived and expected service quality. The empirical research was conducted using primary data. The questionnaire was based on Markovic, Raspor and Šegarić's (2010) research. In order to meet study objectives, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted. The empirical results show that overall, the expectation score was higher than the perception scores, which indicates low level of service quality. The results further show that the most important expectation item was "error-free served order" whilst "clean dining area" was the most important perception item. The attribute "service in the promised time", had the widest statistically significant gap thereby representing serious shortfalls for restaurant service quality. Generally, the findings contribute to the development of a service excellence approach that helps identify customers' requirements (i.e. expectations) and secure performance improvement in restaurant service. Improving restaurant service quality in South Africa will, in turn, not only increase customer satisfaction and strengthen customer loyalty, but also improve restaurants' reputation and lead to enhanced sustainability.

**Keywords:** South Africa, restaurant service quality, customer expectations, customer perceptions, customer satisfaction

## Introduction

When guests dine out at a restaurant, they cognitively evaluate what they experience (Gagić, Tešanović & Jovičić, 2013). Among the potential candidates, perceived quality has been generally accepted as the foremost antecedent of customer satisfaction (Dabholkar, Shepherd & Thorpe, 2000). Like most service industries, the importance of perceived quality has been recognised in the restaurant industry as well (Oh, 2000). Therefore, understanding restaurant customers and having in mind the importance of service attributes are important criteria for gaining a strategic competitive advantages in the restaurant marketplace (Markovic, Raspor & Dorčić, 2011).

Restaurateurs tend to be blurred by emphasising the influence of food on restaurant service quality (Mhlanga, Hattingh & Moolman, 2013). Though important, food is only one of the components of the restaurant experience used by guests in evaluating restaurant service quality. Restaurant service quality is influenced by various restaurant attributes such as the physical environment, employee services, ambience, location, menu type and price. A proper combination of these vital attributes should result in guests' perceptions of high restaurant service quality, which in turn should enhance their satisfaction and loyalty (Mhlanga, 2013).



Some research endeavours (see works by Lim, 2010; Mhlanga, Hattingh & Moolman, 2015; Mhlanga, 2018) argue that there is relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction hence perceived service quality is used as an indicator of customer satisfaction towards the restaurant. According to Ryu and Han (2010), restaurateurs that are able to provide quality service to their customers will gain a greater advantage over their rivals in efforts to retain customers and to attain growth and be sustainable. Consequently, improving the quality, as well as development of measures, act as preconditions for surviving highly competitive and demanding modern market conditions and achieving successful business results (Blešić, Tešanovic & Psodorov, 2011).

According to Gagić et al. (2013), restaurants depend on proper management and managers' education and training is becoming increasingly important in order to meet the guests' needs and expectations and thus ensure customer satisfaction which goes over and above the 'call of duty'. However, despite the importance of restaurant quality, restaurateurs know relatively little about how the combined effects of restaurant service quality elicit restaurant image, guest perceived value, and guest satisfaction, which, in turn, affect guest behaviour (Mhlanga, 2015) and provide impetus for either return business or none.

Restaurant guests ultimately decide upon the quality standards which are fulfilled, and restaurateurs who do not recognise this will experience a decrease in restaurant customers (Mhlanga, Hattingh & Moolman, 2014). Gagić et al. (2013), aver that customer expectations are very important because, in case they are not met, customers will leave the restaurant quietly or spread negative rumours about the restaurant. With this in mind, it may be concluded that satisfaction is created by delivering additional value for money. The aim of this paper is to measure service quality in restaurants by comparing customer expectations and perceptions. Building an inclusive view of quality in restaurants is a pressing concern because it will enable restaurateurs, within the scope of their limited resources, to prioritise decision-making that focuses on key quality attributes (such as food, service and ambience).

## **Theoretical background**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries around the world (Moolman, 2011). The WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) (2016) reports an increase in the global travel and tourism industry's contribution towards gross domestic product (GDP) from 8.6 per cent in 2011 to 10 per cent in 2015. The WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) (2016) furthermore expects an increase in global employment by the travel and tourism industry from over 108 million jobs in 2010 to more than 126 million people by 2024. The South African tourism industry is also regarded as one of the fastest growing sectors of the country's economy [Republic of South Africa National Department of Tourism (RSA NDT), 2017]. According to SSA (Statistics South Africa) (2016), the tourism industry contributed 9 per cent to South Africa's GDP in 2015, whereas in 2016, the industry directly contributed ZAR 127bn to South Africa's GDP [Republic of South Africa National Department of Tourism (RSA NDT), 2017].

Restaurants are classified under the hospitality subsector, which is one of the six subsectors of the South African tourism industry [CATHSSETA (Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Sector Education and Training Authority), 2017]. SSA (Statistics South Africa) (2007) estimates that restaurants employed more than 93,000 employees in 2007, thus employing more people than the mining, communication services, automotive manufacturing and chemicals manufacturing sectors, and the total income generated by restaurants increased from ZAR 1,452m in September 2009 to ZAR 1,592m in September 2010 [SSA (Statistics South Africa), 2010]. Restaurants are therefore a critical cornerstone of the tourism industry [Republic of South Africa National Department of Tourism (RSA NDT), 2017].

Because of the growing income of the black middle class in South Africa, there has been an increase in the number of restaurant customers as more people now eat out than before



(Moolman, 2011). However, despite the increasing popularity of eating out in South Africa, restaurants have struggled to remain profitable, with some only surviving for very short lifespans (Mhlanga & Machingambi, 2016). Mhlanga and Tichaawa (2017) attribute restaurateurs' inability to identify restaurant service quality factors impacting customer satisfaction as the main reason for restaurant failure. Therefore, a better understanding of the factors impacting restaurant service quality will provide important practical implications for restaurateurs (Mhlanga, 2018).

## Literature Review

The relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality is a controversial issue in the literature. There is a general agreement by researchers that the concepts of customer satisfaction and service quality are closely interrelated. Although satisfaction and service quality are close in meaning, they are distinct aspects. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990), perceived service quality is the extent to which a restaurant successfully serves the purpose of its diverse range of customers. The restaurant customers' perception of service quality results from their evaluation of their dining experiences and expected service.

In 2004, Iglesias and Guillén (2004) determined that perceived quality had a positive effect on customer satisfaction. In the same year, Sulek and Hensley (2004) found that food quality and a restaurant's atmosphere, had a significant effect on customer satisfaction. Yüksel and Yüksel (2004) also established in 2004 that service quality had the most significant effect on the dining satisfaction amongst 449 departing tourists in Turkey. Mohsin, McIntosh and Cave (2005) revealed that value for money, variety and quality of the products available, staff-related skills, staff presentation and manners, and well-timed service were ranked as the five most important expectations of customers in New Zealand restaurants.

In 2006, Andaleed and Conway (2006) found that customer satisfaction was significantly influenced by the responsiveness of the employees, price and food quality. Kim et al. (2009) found that five extracted restaurant dimensions (food, quality, service quality, price and value, atmosphere and convenience) had a significant effect on overall customer satisfaction. The findings of Liu and Jang (2009) indicated that food quality (taste, food safety, menu variety, food presentation), service reliability, environmental cleanliness, interior design, and neat and well-dressed employees significantly influenced customer satisfaction. Markovic, Raspor and Šegaric (2010) found that an error-free served order, clean rest rooms, clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff, and clean dining areas significantly influences customer expectations of service quality, whilst clean dining areas, accurate bills, easily readable menus, and clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff, all significantly influenced customer perceptions of service quality.

Qin and Prybutok's (2008) investigation of service quality and customer satisfaction in restaurants in China using modified SERVPERF instrument, found that the antecedents of customer satisfaction at the fast food restaurants in China were service quality, food quality and perceived value. Kim et al. (2009) found that five extracted restaurant dimensions - food quality, service quality, price and value, atmosphere and convenience - had a significant impact on overall customer satisfaction. Furthermore, food quality (taste, food safety, menu variety, and food presentation), service reliability, environmental cleanliness, internal design, and tidy, well-dressed employees were found to have significant influence on customer satisfaction by Liu and Jang (2009).

Namkung and Jang (2007) found that overall food quality significantly affected customer satisfaction. Ha and Jang (2010) in a study investigating the effect of service quality and food quality in Korean ethnic restaurant concluded that providing quality food is particularly critical for creating customer satisfaction. Similarly, Min and Min (2011) examined service quality and



customer satisfaction in fast food restaurant franchises in the USA. The results of their study revealed that the taste of food was the most important service attribute on fast food restaurant customers' impressions of service quality and subsequently satisfaction.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to measure service quality in East London, a coastal city in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. However, to achieve the main objective, the following secondary objectives were formulated:

- (1) To measure customer expectations of restaurant service quality,
- (2) To measure customer perceptions of restaurant service quality, and
- (3) To measure the differences between perceived and expected service quality in restaurants.

### **Methodology**

A list of local registered restaurants was obtained from Buffalo City Municipality. There were 33 registered restaurants in East London at the time of the study, of which seventeen of them were included in the study. These restaurants complied with the criteria set by SSA (Statistics South Africa) (2016:7), namely, an "enterprise involved in the sale and provision of meals and drinks, ordered from a menu, prepared on the premises for immediate consumption and with provided seating." The other food and beverage outlets could not be classified as restaurants, but as fast-food outlets and were therefore excluded. These enterprises provide food and beverages intended for takeaway purposes and in a packaged format.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Mpumalanga. The study was voluntary and verbal consent was obtained from all the restaurant customers whilst permission was obtained from the restaurant managers. Restaurateurs were assured that all information collected would be treated as anonymous. The results of the study would be made known to all restaurateurs. It was, however, agreed that each restaurateur would only be informed of the identity of his or her own restaurant.

The level of expected and perceived service quality was measured on the basis of 32 restaurant service quality attributes. These attributes were adapted from Markovic, Raspor and Šegaric's (2010) study. The level of agreement with given statements was assessed using a five point Likert-type scale. The five response alternatives for measuring customer expectations and perceptions of service quality ranged from 'strongly disagree - (1)', 'disagree - (2)', 'neither disagree nor agree - (3)', 'agree - (4)', to 'and strongly agree - (5)'.

The questionnaire items were phrased in English, not only because the majority of restaurant customers were expected to be quite conversant in English, but also because it is one of the main languages spoken in East London, South Africa apart from IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. Therefore, all respondents were able to respond in English. Struwig and Stead (2001) point out that a questionnaire should be phrased in the language that the respondents will easily understand and should be precise to maintain interest and to ensure reliability of the responses.

The clarity of the instructions, ease of completing the questionnaire and time taken to complete the questionnaire (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) were piloted using ten customers in each of the targeted restaurants. No changes were made to the questionnaire. Restaurants were visited for data collection from Thursdays to Sundays, over a two months period. Questionnaires were provided by the waiter and the researcher to the restaurant customer who was presented with the bill. The researcher explained the purpose of the survey, indicated that participation was



voluntary and requested guests to complete the questionnaire. Convenience sampling therefore used. The sample size for the study was determined such that it achieved a 95% confidence level and was within a 5% sampling error (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Consequently, a sample size of 253 customers was deemed appropriate and used for this study. Completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher upon payment of the bill.

## Results

A total of 253 fully completed questionnaires were gathered. The respondents' demographic profile is depicted in Table 1. Of the 253 respondents, 57% (n=144) were female. Most of the respondents were in the age group 25 to 34 years (29%), followed by respondents in the age group 35 to 44 years (25%). IsiXhosa was the language most frequently used by respondents (41%), followed by English (27%). Most of the respondents (74%) resided in East London.

**Table 1: Demographic information and overall means and standard deviations**

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	n	%	OVERALL SERVICE QUALITY	
			M	SD
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	109	43	4.11	0.86
Female	144	57	4.39	0.61
<b>Age</b>				
18-24 years	54	21	3.72	1.24
25-34 years	73	29	4.01	0.92
35-44 years	62	25	4.23	0.57
45-54 years	41	16	4.16	0.76
Older than 54 years	23	9	4.09	0.69
<b>Language</b>				
English	69	27	3.65	0.44
IsiXhosa	104	41	4.34	0.73
IsiZulu	29	12	4.07	0.81
Other,	51	20	3.95	0.65
<b>Permanent residency</b>				
East London	187	74	4.29	0.79
Other town or city	66	26	3.78	1.03
<b>All</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4.06</b>	<b>0.78</b>

Table 1 depicts the mean scores and standard deviations calculated for the total sample and different demographic groups. An initial glance at the data reveals that respondents in the age group 18 to 24 years experienced the lowest service quality score (3.72) whilst female respondents experienced the highest service quality score (4.39). Standard deviations between 0.44 and 1.24 were calculated.

Descriptive analysis was used to show respondents' expectations and perceptions of restaurant service quality as well as the service quality gap. The results of respondents' expectations and perceptions of restaurant service quality and the service gap are depicted in Table 2.



**Table 2: Customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality in restaurants.**

	Attributes	Expectations		Perceptions		Gap	t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
V1	Visually attractive parking areas and building exteriors	4.36	0.56	4.41	0.79	0.05	2.53*
V2	Visually attractive dining area	4.40	1.03	4.47	0.61	0.07	6.08*
V3	Clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff	4.53	0.84	4.59	0.62	0.06	4.71*
V4	Restaurant's décor typical of its image and price range	4.57	0.42	4.26	0.95	-0.31	7.02*
V5	Easily readable menu	4.39	0.65	4.55	0.82	0.16	3.04*
V6	Visually attractive menu	4.36	0.71	4.46	0.69	0.10	3.16*
V7	Comfortable dining area	4.50	0.93	4.39	0.74	-0.11	1.98*
V8	Clean rest rooms	4.55	0.71	4.34	0.40	-0.11	1.95*
V9	Clean dining area	4.59	0.69	4.63	0.58	0.04	2.37*
V10	Comfortable seats in the dining room	4.26	0.55	4.38	0.77	0.12	4.04*
V11	Service in the promised time	4.67	0.78	3.91	0.63	-0.76	9.89*
V12	Quick correction of wrong service	4.33	0.62	4.26	0.71	-0.07	2.94*
V13	Dependable and consistent restaurant	4.55	0.77	4.21	0.86	-0.34	4.57*
V14	Accurate bill	4.48	0.60	4.52	0.58	0.04	3.31*
V15	Error-free served order	4.73	0.48	4.02	0.67	-0.71	5.87*
V16	Maintaining speed and quality of service during busy times	4.43	0.72	4.25	0.61	-0.18	2.06*
V17	Provision of prompt service	4.71	0.96	3.98	1.09	-0.73	5.64*
V18	Extra effort for handling special requests	4.23	1.13	4.40	0.66	0.17	2.95*
V19	Employees can answer questions completely	4.44	0.81	4.27	0.79	-0.17	2.86*
V20	Comfortable and confident feeling	4.34	0.59	4.29	0.62	-0.05	1.39
V21	Staff provide information about menu items, their ingredients and method of preparation	4.49	0.64	4.19	0.76	-0.30	4.37*
V22	Feeling safe	4.69	0.90	4.13	0.56	-0.56	4.92*
V23	Well trained, competent and experienced staff	4.66	0.51	4.31	0.44	-0.35	4.56*
V24	Restaurant supports the employees	4.14	0.57	4.24	0.89	0.10	3.02*
V25	Employees provide individual attention	4.19	0.66	4.15	1.03	-0.04	1.36
V26	Special feeling	4.34	0.86	4.46	0.42	0.12	3.41*
V27	Anticipation of customers' individual needs and wants	4.35	0.63	4.15	0.54	-0.20	2.11*
V28	Sympathetic and reassuring employees	4.20	0.76	4.07	0.60	-0.13	2.06*
V29	Customers' best interests at heart	4.48	0.58	4.12	1.01	-0.36	3.38*
V30	Expensive food items	4.03	0.98	4.17	0.75	0.14	2.54*
V31	Paying more than planned	4.11	0.62	4.13	0.73	0.02	2.07*
V32	Overall satisfaction with dining experience	4.54	0.52	4.09	0.67	-0.45	2.50*
	<b>Overall mean for 32 attributes</b>	<b>4.43</b>		<b>4.28</b>		<b>-0.15</b>	



Customers' expectations and perceptions were measured on a five point Likert-type scale, where the higher the score, the greater the expectation (perception) of restaurant service quality. The mean scores of customers' expectations ranged from 4.03 to 4.73. The lowest expectation item was "expensive food items" (V30), which indicates that restaurant customers did not expect expensive food items in restaurants. On the other hand, restaurant customers' highest expectations were regarding the "error-free served order" (V15). Therefore, the service when serving an order is an important attribute that should be considered in meeting customers' expectations. The overall mean score for service quality expectation items was 4.43. This score indicates rather high expectations of restaurant customers regarding service quality.

The mean scores of customers' perceptions ranged from 3.91 to 4.63. The lowest perception items was "service in the promised time" (V11) which indicates that restaurant customers did not receive service in the promised time. On the other hand, customers' highest perceptions was "clean dining area" (V9). The overall mean score for service quality perceptions items was 4.28. This score indicates slightly high perceptions of restaurant customers regarding service quality.

From Table 2, it is clear that 19 of the restaurant customers' expectations were higher than their perceptions of delivered service. Hence, the DINESERV gap is negative for 19 restaurant attributes where restaurant customers' expectations were higher than their perceptions of delivered service. The narrowest negative gap was for the attribute "employees provide individual attention" (V25). This low negative gap score implies that there is a small difference between perceived and expected service. Therefore, this restaurant attribute is close to the expected service quality. However, the widest gap was for the item "service in the promised time" (V11), indicating that customers expected service much earlier in the promised time than the time they actually received it. Finally, the overall DINESERV gap was -0.15. The results imply that restaurant service quality should be improved, because most of the restaurant attributes were assessed below customers' expectations.

A comparison of customers' perceptions of service quality with their expectations, using the paired samples t-test, indicated a statistically significant difference on 30 of the 32 examined restaurant attributes. Although the narrowest gaps were "comfortable and confident feeling" (V20) and "employees provide individual attention" (V25), they are not statistically significant (Sig. 0.129 and Sig 0.101, respectively). The biggest negative gap ("service in the promised time") is statistically significant (Sig. 0000). The gap between customers' expectations and their perception of delivered service has become the principal indicator of determining and assessing service quality of restaurants. The methodology is known as SERVQUAL scale and provides restaurateurs with important insights about how well actual service performance meets customers' expectations. Consequently, it was justified to employ the modified scale in this study to gauge whether delivered service meets, exceeds or falls below customers' expectations.

A comparison of customers' service quality levels experiences in the sixteen restaurants is provided in Table 3. This table depicts the variable mean scores and standard deviations calculated for overall service quality in the respective restaurants and also for all the restaurants.

**Table 3: Means and standard deviations for service quality in the respective restaurants**

Restaurant	n	Overall service quality	
		Mean	SD
A	23	4.06	0.67
B	13	4.29	0.91
C	21	3.86	1.05
D	10	4.64	0.86
E	15	3.72	0.59
F	17	4.03	0.77
G	12	4.51	0.46
H	14	4.17	0.62
I	16	4.38	0.94
J	11	4.22	1.08
K	12	3.95	0.73
L	14	4.68	0.65
M	16	4.19	0.55
N	20	4.33	0.80
O	11	4.14	0.61
P	15	3.86	0.48
Q	13	4.25	0.69
<b>All</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>4.19</b>	<b>0.73</b>

Restaurant L obtained the highest level of service quality (4.68) followed by Restaurant D (4.64). However, Restaurant E obtained the lowest level of service quality (3.72). The two restaurants (Restaurants L and D) that recorded the highest service quality scores were fine dining restaurants, while the restaurant that recorded the lowest scores (Hotel D) was a fast-food restaurant. The results show that customers in different types of restaurants experienced different level of service and confirm the assertion by the Restaurant Association of South Africa (RASA, 2017) that the perceived service expectancy would be better at a fine dining restaurant than at a fast food restaurant. This implies that perceived service quality has a direct effect on customer experiences in restaurants. Consequently, restaurant type significantly influences service quality in restaurants (Mhlanga, 2018).

## Discussion

The results show that the most important expectations item was “error-free served order”. The results corroborate the findings by Markovic et al. (2010) found that error-free served order, clean rest rooms, clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff, and clean dining areas significantly influences customer expectations of service quality. However, restaurateurs should not ignore restaurant attributes that were assessed with the lowest expectations scores. These items are just less important when compared to other attributes. If the “expensive food items” attribute meets the expected minimum, customers will focus on other attributes in the service quality evaluation process. Consequently, restaurateurs should maintain at least this expected minimum of restaurant service.

The overall mean score for service quality perceptions items was 4.28. This indicates that restaurants in East London as a whole performed below average. The top perception attribute was “clean dining area”. The results confirm the findings by Markovic et al (2010) who found





that clean dining area, accurate bill, easily readable menu, and clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff significantly influenced customer perceptions of service quality. However, the results deviate from the findings by Min and Min (2011) who found that taste food significantly influenced service quality and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurant franchises in the USA whilst Ha and Jang (2010) found that food quality significantly influenced service quality and customer satisfaction in Korean ethnic restaurants

The reported differences could occur due to different sample characteristics (e.g. fast food restaurants in Min and Min's (2011) study, ethnic restaurants in Ha and Jang's (2010) study and customers of different types of restaurant settings in the present study), and because of the different modifications of DINESERV instrument used in each of the studies mentioned.

The results of the gap analysis imply that restaurant service providers did not meet customers' expectations. The overall DINESERV gap was -0.15, which indicates that overall restaurant service quality fell below customers' expectations and that there is room for service quality improvement in the restaurant industry in East London. According to the findings, the biggest gap related to "service in the promised time", meaning that customers expected much faster service than it actually was. The attribute with the widest statistically significant gap represents serious shortfalls and require significant attention of restaurant managers in terms of making improvement efforts.

### **Conclusions and managerial implications**

The purpose of this research endeavour was to measure restaurant service quality in restaurants in East London, South Africa. The study results confirm that service quality evaluations comprise both tangible and intangible aspects of provided service and that restaurateurs should be more committed to performance improvement. They should consider "error-free served order" to meet customer expectations of service quality and "clean dining area" to meet customer perceptions of service quality. To improve service quality, restaurants should deliver service in the promised time as this attribute had the widest statistically significant gap which represented serious shortfalls and thereby requires significant attention of restaurant managers in terms of making improvement efforts.

Based on the results presented above, since customers' experiences of service quality vary according to gender, Mhlanga et al. (2015), argue that men and women tend to have different attitudinal and behavioural orientations in their buying behaviour. Consequently, restaurants could segment their level of service on the basis of customers' gender and metro sexuality by using gender segmentation, differentiation and positioning strategies to target a specific gender.

Furthermore, since customers from different age groups rated restaurant service quality differently (see Table 1) participating restaurants may find it useful to tailor their offerings based on the age groups of customers. Restaurant managers could therefore use different market segmentation strategies for different age groups. When a restaurant targets a specific group of customers differently it is likely to exceed their expectations and ensure customer satisfaction in an accumulating manner (Mhlanga et al., 2015).

Despite its managerial implications, the study has several limitations. The research was based on service quality in restaurants situated in a specific city in South Africa. Caution is therefore required when generalising the findings of this study to other segments of the restaurant industry in other geographic areas, since a replication of this study in other geographic areas might reveal varying levels of service quality. Although it is not expected that the findings would be significantly different, it would be worthwhile to expand this research throughout the country to improve the generalizability of the results. Also, the measurement of restaurant service quality was limited to 32 restaurant attributes.



Nevertheless, the study implies two main contributions. Generally, the findings contribute to the development of a service excellence approach that helps identify customers' requirements (i.e. expectations) and secure performance improvement in restaurant service. In this context, results may broaden the knowledge of restaurant service quality are suitable for international comparison. In particular, the study itself is considered useful for South African academics and restaurateurs, as it captures the measurement of both expectations and perceptions attributes. Improving restaurant service quality in South Africa will, in turn, not only increase customer satisfaction and strengthen customer loyalty, but also improve restaurants' reputation and increase restaurant sales.

The restaurant industry is a demanding sector that stresses the provision of high-level customer service and continuous quality improvement. Development of a clear picture of service quality in the restaurant industry context is important to more precisely identify the "whats" and "how's" of service-quality improvement, both in everyday and extraordinary contexts. Service quality is essential for a restaurant's overall performance, and restaurateurs should put effort in order to identify what determines it. When service does not meet a customer's expectations, customers may seek out other more suitable options. Satisfaction of users is not a static category. Instead, it changes dynamically in accordance with behaviour, wishes, needs and requirements of users of restaurant services.

Restaurateurs should not underestimate their competition, but should continuously monitor and compare their service quality levels with those of similar restaurants for the long-term sustainability of the business. Due to restaurant density in East London, each restaurant should aim to differentiate itself from other restaurants.

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