

ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER'S PERCEPTION ON HYGIENE PRACTICES AMONG FOOD VENDORS IN ABIA STATE UNIVERSITY UTURU, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study focuses on assessment of customer's perception on hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia State University Uturu, Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to: ascertain the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors, determine the customer's attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors and identify the reasons behind negative customer's perception of hygiene practice among food vendors. To achieve these objectives: descriptive survey design was used. The population comprised of 200 undergraduate students of Abia State University Uturu, Nigeria. The sample size is 133 respondents. In line with the stated objectives, the data was collected through the use of structured questionnaire. The result shows that Unkept service environment can expose customers to foodborne illness and food vendors who do not Wash their hands often before serving of food can contaminate food. The study concludes that food vendors environment with high level of cleanliness and sanitation seems to attract more new customers as well as retaining existing ones than ones with dirty and unkept environment. The study recommends that training of food handling personnel is critical, and food vendors should be aware of their role and responsibility in protecting the food from contamination.

Keywords: Food vendors, food, hygiene, environment, customers.

Introduction

Assessment of customer's perception on hygiene practices among food vendors is very important, and it is crucial that it is improved in food service establishments. According to Soares et al. (2012) training programs are an integral part of creating a positive culture of food hygiene and they must occur occasionally, in order to promote changes in people's behaviours through attitudes and practices that encourage the production of safe food by reducing the risk food borne illness.

In 2017, World Health Organization estimated that approximately 600 million people fall ill after eating contaminated food resulting in 33 million healthy years; foodborne diseases account for 40% diseases burden among under 5 years. Food contamination is common not only in developing countries but also in developed countries of the world. This is particularly high when food is prepared for a large number of people at the same time, especially in canteens and restaurants. A total of 2.5 billion people all over the world eat street foods everyday (WHO, 2015). When customers go out to a restaurant, they look for possible visible cues to perceive and assess the level of food hygiene practice of the vendor serving them. Iwu, Uwakwe, Duru, Diwe, Chineke and Merenu (2017) opined that food vendors are often poor and uneducated and lack appreciation for safe food handling. Consequently, street foods sold by vendors are perceived to be a major public health risk. If a community is to have the full benefits of street-vended foods with minimal risk of food borne disease, government intervention is required to ensure that the standard of

safety for such foods is the best attainable in the context of the prevailing local situation. However, the problem is exacerbated in developing countries due to economic reasons inflations, poverty, lack of adequate health care facilities, and the dearth of data regarding food-borne diseases. The hygienic practices of street or vended foods around the tertiary institutions in Nigeria is therefore one of the most pressing health and safety issues facing most developing countries since it leads to both public health and social consequences (Feglo & Sakyi, 2018).

Nowadays, customers expect the foods they purchase and consume in any food vendor or even around the school vicinity to be and of high quality. They also have the right to voice their opinions about the hygienic practices used by the food vendors in serving their customers. This right influences their attitude. The attitudes determines the customer's disposition to respond positively or negatively to the services rendered by the vendors. When a customer/consumer evaluate a product alternatives that may satisfy the same need, desire or want, he integrate the perceptions of the alternatives into an overall judgment, or attitude, about the attractiveness of each product alternative (Alimi, 2016).

Customer's perception on hygiene practices among food vendors in tertiary institutions has been an issue of concern. Alimi (2016) reported that customers perceived that street food is mostly criticized and viewed as a health threat when the places they are produced and sold are open to dirt and contamination, and that hygiene, attitude, and applications adopted by the sellers during food preparation and storage are insufficient. Hanan, Sadri and Yusup (2021) argues that consumers of food prepared by food vendors believes that avoiding dirt at the place of food marketing was already desirable. Similarly, Franklin and Badrie (2015) observed that business place with high level of cleanliness and sanitation seems to attract more new customers as well as retaining existing ones than one with dirty and unkept environment.

Customers in today's world have limited amount of money which they are willing to spend, Bellia, Pilato and Seraphin, (2016) said customers prefer to spend their money where they do not have to worry about health issues, clutter, and all the rest provided the place is clean.

According to Okojie and Isah (2014), there has been an inadequate supervision and monitoring by food safety officers and the enforcement of food hygiene regulation has been weak. Poor sanitary conditions like open gutters, flies, improper waste disposal, and overcrowding are still persistent dangers to food hygiene (Onyeneho & Hedberg, 2017). Even vendors who exhibit knowledge about food hygiene still find it difficult, associating dirty hands with the transmission of diarrheal pathogens. Just to say the least, the sources of food contamination are but few of the roots and sources of contamination that are known in the limelight. Very little is usually known and explored about how street food vendors themselves perceive food safety and how to practice it. This have necessitated the need to assess customer's perception on hygiene practice among food vendors in tertiary institutions in Abia State University Uturu

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study was to assess customer's perception on hygiene practices among food vendors in tertiary institutions, in Abia state University Uturu, Nigeria.

. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Ascertain the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu.
- ii. Determine the customer's attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu.
- iii. Identify the reasons behind negative customer's perception of hygiene practice among food vendors in tertiary institutions in Abia state University, Uturu.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will guide this study.

1. What are the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu?
2. What are the customer's attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu?

3. What are the reasons behind negative customer's perception of hygiene practice

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Customer perception is the customer's overall opinion, thought, awareness and feelings about a company and its product and service offerings. Customer Perception is very important for industries or brands as it tells them how their potential customers think about them (Franklin and Badrie, 2015). Rossi *et al.* (2012) propose that consumers seek some reciprocity from the place where they eat, expressed in the form of good service. This good service is represented by the cleanliness, behavior, politeness and solicitude of the vendors. Consumer behavior is very complex and determined by emotions, motives and attitudes (Alimi, 2016). The attitudes play a fundamental role in consumer choice field, because, it determine the customer's disposition to respond positively or negatively to an institution, person, event, object or product.

Food hygiene knowledge is very important, and it is crucial that it is improved in food service establishments. The lack of such knowledge by food vendors may lead to infection of food prepared. Food handlers play an important role in ensuring the safety of food throughout production and storage. A recent meta-analysis has shown that food hygiene training increases knowledge and improves attitudes about hand hygiene practices and that refresher training and regular emphasis on hand washing practices among food handlers (Noon & Baines, 2012). The attitude of a food handler is a crucial factor that may influence food hygiene behaviour and practices (Al-shabi, Mosithy & Husain, 2016). Improper handling is responsible for most cases of foodborne illness. Training for caterers has been shown to improve food hygiene knowledge and awareness and may result in improved hygiene practices. According to Soares *et al.* (2012) training programs are an integral part of creating a positive culture of food hygiene and they must occur occasionally, in order to promote changes in people's behaviours through attitudes and practices that encourage the production of safe by reducing the risk food borne illness. According to the WHO (2015) food handlers play a significant role in ensuring food is safe throughout the chain of production and storage, therefore it is important that the food handling personnel are educated on hygiene and also follow hygiene practices such as thorough washing of hands before handling food using soap, wearing clean uniform on duty, washing their hands after using the toilet and other hygiene practices.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The study is carried out in Umuahia North, Abia State. Umuahia North is a local government of Abia State, The population of the study comprised of 200 undergraduate students of Abia State University, Uturu. To ensure the determination of accurate sample size, the statistical formula derived by Yamane (1964) was employed. Therefore the sample size is 133 respondents. In line with the stated objectives, the data was collected through the use of structured questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: What are the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu?

Table 1 Mean responses of respondents on the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu?

S/N	Guest Perception	SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean	Remarks
1	Unkept service environment can expose customers to food- born illness.	55(64%)	25(29%)	6(7%)	0	86	307	3.57	Accept
2	Food vendors do not Wash their hands often before serving of food.	50(58%)	26(30%)	10(12%)	0	86	298	3.47	Accept
3	Food vendors do not cover their heads while serving of food.	45(52%)	35(41%)	6(7%)	0	86	297	3.45	Accept
4	Poor cleaning of service equipments such as tables and chairs before serving of food	50(58%)	26(30%)	10(12%)	0	86	298	3.47	Accept
5	Poor service quality.	60(70%)	21(24%)	5(6%)	0	86	313	3.64	Accept
	Grand mean							3.52	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The result on the mean responses of respondents on the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu. The result presented on table 1 shows that Unkept service environment can expose customers to food- born illness, food vendors do not Wash their hands often before serving of food, Food vendors do not cover their heads while serving of food, Poor cleaning of service equipments such as tables and chairs before serving of food and Poor service quality are the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu.

All the items had an acceptable mean response score of 2.50. Items 5 has the highest mean of 3.64 followed by item 1 with mean of 3.57 and then item 2 with mean of 3.47. Hence, item 5 has the lowest mean of 3.36. This implies that the perception of customers towards food handling and hygiene practices is the reality and food vendors should take correction.

Question 2: What are the customer’s attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu?

Table 2 Mean responses of respondents on the customer’s attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu?

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean	Remark
1	Total rejection of food by customers.	50(58%)	20(23%)	10(12%)	6(7%)	86	286	3.33	Accept
2	Loss of appetite by customers.	45(52%)	35(41%)	6(7%)	0	86	297	3.45	Accept
3	Lack of satisfaction by customers	51(59%)	22(25.5%)	12(14%)	1(1%)	86	295	3.43	Accept
4	Lack of customers patronage as a result of unhygienic practices	47(54.5%)	30(35%)	9(10.5%)	0	86	296	3.44	Accept
5	Change in the choice of restaurant.	40(46.5%)	40(46.5%)	6(7%)	0	86	292	3.40	Accept
	Grand mean							3.41	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The result on Table 2 shows the customer's attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu. The result indicates that total rejection of food by customers, loss of appetite by customers, lack of satisfaction by customers, lack of customers patronage as a result of unhygienic practices and change in the choice of restaurant are the customer's attitude towards hygiene practices among food vendors in Abia state University, Uturu. The items have mean response of 3.33, 3.45, 3.43, 3.44, and 3.40 respectively. All these items have mean greater than 2.5. This implies that the Customer's attitude towards hygiene practices is to be put in place.

Conclusion

Customer's perception on hygiene practices among food vendors in tertiary institutions has been an issue of concern. Customers perceived that school food is mostly criticized and viewed as a health threat when the places they are produced and sold are open to dirt and contamination, and that hygiene, attitude, and applications adopted by the sellers during food preparation and storage are insufficient. Consumers of food prepared by food vendors believes that avoiding dirt at the place of food marketing was already desirable. Business place with high level of cleanliness and sanitation seems to attract more new customers as well as retaining existing ones than one with dirty and unkept environment.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Hygiene practices include washing and sanitising of all equipment including utensils, knives, chopping boards and work surfaces before and after use when preparing different foods. For example, raw meat and cooked meat, washing of hands between preparation tasks, in particular after handling raw meat, poultry or seafood, changing single-use gloves after handling raw foods, using clean utensils each time you taste food, minimising contact with food wherever possible by using utensils or single-use gloves, and not storing raw foods above cooked foods.
2. The training of food handling personnel is critical, and personnel should be aware of their role and responsibility in protecting the food from contamination, thus ensuring that clients' meals are free from any type of contamination.
3. The prospective food handlers seeking an eatery in Abia State university should compulsorily made to have pre-employment examination to assess his/her level of knowledge of food hygiene by sanitary health officers of environmental health unit.
4. The university rules and regulations concerning choice of site for restaurant, the requirements of the structure, standard hygiene practice e.t.c. should always be enforced by health team of the environmental health unit of the university.
- 5 Regular and periodic medical examinations by medical officers, for the food handlers should be norm rather than a present unscheduled

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