

**FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS'  
SATISFACTION IN CAMPUS CAFETERIAS: AN  
EMPIRICAL STUDY ON PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AT  
KLANG VALLEY IN MALAYSIA**

**BY**

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for  
the degree of Master of Science (Marketing)**

**Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Science  
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## ABSTRACT

Cafeteria facilities are key component of a wholesome arrangement that impacts personal happiness for both native and foreign students. For university students, the first option for dining is on-campus foodservices which implies the importance of the quality of the cafeteria service. To preserve students' happiness with on-campus foodservice, university foodservice must be reviewed and improved on a regular basis. Since university students who eat in the university's cafeteria often communicate with each other, comments about the food service spread very quickly among people which, if negative, can often tarnish the credibility of a service provider even if one or two student is dissatisfied and give negative comments. Hence, considering the importance of students' satisfaction this study was conducted with the goal of investigating the link between variables such as pricing, food quality, customer service, and atmosphere with students' satisfaction. Convenience sampling method was used to collect quantitative data from 250 students at public universities in Klang valley of Malaysia which are IIUM, UPM, UM, UiTM, UKM and UTM. The survey was conducted via google form within a duration of 20 days from 15<sup>th</sup> August until 4<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The collected data was later analysed using regression analysis and factor analysis the help of SPSS software. The study revealed that students' satisfaction was associated with the four independent variables. Moreover, all the factors had significant and positive influence on students' satisfaction. From the regression analysis it was found that the customer service and price fairness had the most significant influence over student satisfaction which was followed closely by the other two variables which were food quality and atmosphere. This implies that even though all the factors considered in this study were significantly important to the students, the price fairness and customer service were most prioritized. The reason of this could be the financial hardship of students who try to control their expenses. However, towards the conclusion of the study, it was discovered that all of the independent factors included in the study had a substantial influence on the dependent variable, which was student satisfaction. As a result, the study found that all four hypotheses evaluated in this study were accepted and supported.

## خلاصة البحث

تعتبر مرافق الكافتيريا من أهم مكونات الترتيب الجيد التي لها تأثير على الرضا الشخصي للطلبة المحليين والوافدين .وبالنسبة لطلبة الجامعات فإن خدمات الأطعمة المقدمة في الحرم الجامعي هي الخيار الأول وهو مايشير إلى أهمية جودة خدمات الكافتيريا. وللمحافظة على رضا الطلبة بالخدمات المقدمة داخل الحرم الجامعي، يجب إعادة النظر في خدمة الأطعمة وتطويرها بشكل منتظم. وبما أن طلبة الجامعات ممن يتناولون وجباتهم في الكافتيريا على تواصل فيما بينهم، فإن الملاحظات تنتشر بشكل سريع بين الناس الأمر الذي يؤثر على مصداقية مقدم الخدمات، وذلك في حالة إذا كانت هذه التعليقات سيئة، حتى وإن جاءت من طالب أو طالبين. لذلك، نظرا لأهمية رضا الطلبة، تم إجراء هذه الدراسة بهدف التحقق من الارتباط بين متغيرات مثل الأسعار، وجودة الطعام، وخدمة العملاء، والبيئة ورضا الطلبة. تم استخدام العينة المبسطة لجمع البيانات الكمية من 250 طالب من الجامعات الحكومية في منطقة كلانج فالي في ماليزيا وهي الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا IIUM، وجامعة ملايا UM، وجامعة بوترا الماليزية UPM، وجامعة مارا التقنية UiTM، الجامعة الوطنية UKM، وجامعة التكنولوجيا UTM. تم إجراء الاستطلاع باستخدام جوجل فورم لمدة 20 يوم من تاريخ 15 أغسطس إلى 4 سبتمبر 2021م، وبعد ذلك تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام تحليل الانحدار وتحليل العوامل في برنامج SPSS. وأظهرت الدراسة أن رضا الطلبة مرتبط بالمتغيرات المستقلة الأربعة . كما أن لجميع العوامل تأثيراً كبيراً وإيجابياً على رضا الطلبة. ومن واقع تحليل الانحدار وُجد أن لخدمة العملاء واعتدال الأسعار أعظم تأثير على رضا الطلبة وبعده مباشرة جاء العاملان الآخريان وهما جودة الطعام والبيئة. وهذا يعني بأنه على الرغم من أن جميع العوامل المعتبرة في هذه الدراسة كانت هامة جداً بالنسبة للطلبة، إلا أن الأولوية كانت لاعتدال الأسعار وخدمة العملاء. وقد يعود السبب إلى الصعوبات المالية التي تواجه الطلبة الذين يحاولون توفير والتحكم ف نفقاتهم اليومية. لكن في ختام الدراسة، وجد أن جميع العوامل المستقلة في هذه الدراسة كان لها تأثيراً كبيراً على المتغير التابع وهو رضا الطلبة. وختاماً خلصت الدراسة إلى أن الفروض الأربعة التي تم اختبارها في هذه الدراسة كانت مقبولة ومدعومة .

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Science in Marketing

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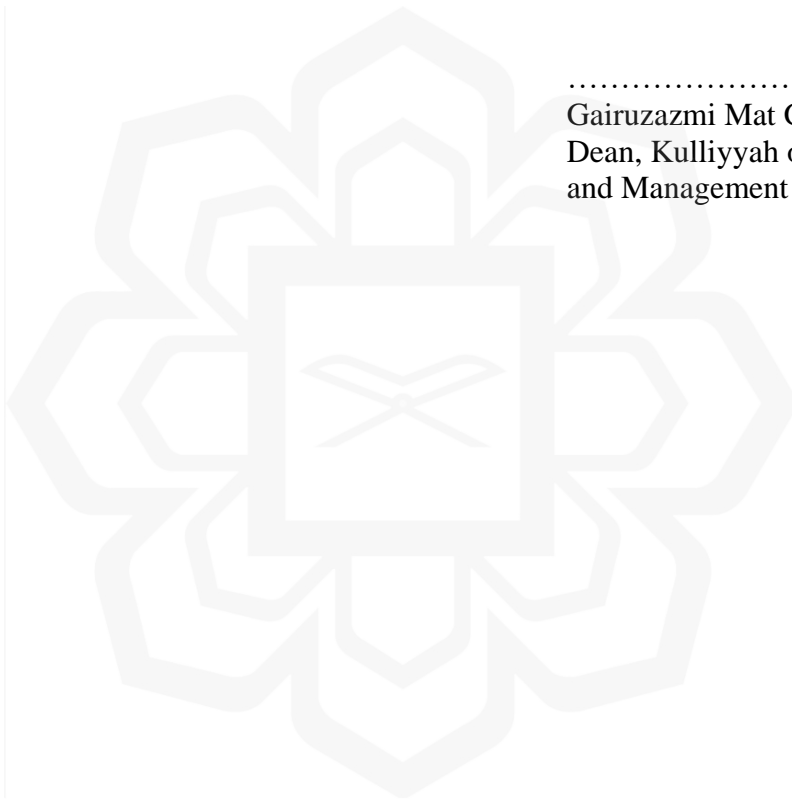
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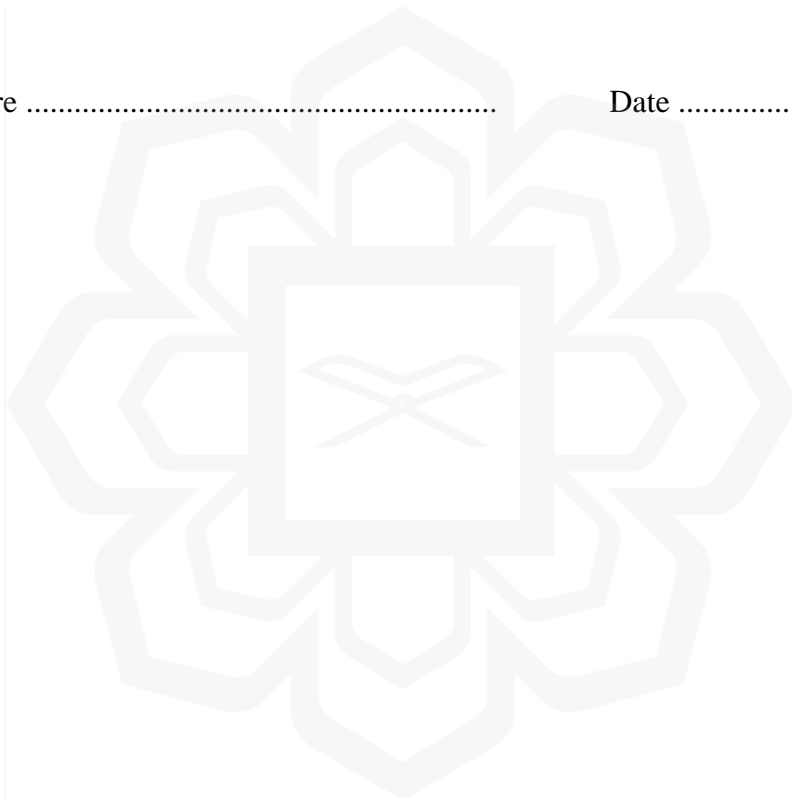


## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Afroza Kaniz

Signature ..... Date .....



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ABSTRACT IN ARABIC .....	iii
APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
DECLARATION .....	ivi
COPYRIGHT PAGE .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	viii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATION.....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY .....	1
1.3 CONCEPT OF CAFE.....	4
1.4 STUDENT AS A CUSTOMER .....	6
1.5 UNIVERSITY FACILITY IN KLANG VALLEY MALAYSIA .....	9
1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	17
1.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	20
1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	20
1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY .....	21
1.10 SCOPE OF STUDY .....	23
1.11 DEFINITION OF CONSTRUCTS .....	23
1.12 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE .....	24
1.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	25
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	26
2.2 STUDENT SATISFACTION.....	26
2.3 RELATED PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL STUDY.....	30
2.4 FACTORS TO BE FOCUSED.....	31
2.4.1 FOOD QUALITY .....	31
2.4.2 PRICE FAIRNESS .....	34
2.4.3 ATMOSPHERE .....	37
2.4.4 CUSTOMER SERVICES .....	40
2.5 RELATED THEORY.....	41
2.6 SATISFACTION THEORY.....	43
2.5.1 EXPECTANCY DISCONFIRMATION THEORY:.....	44
2.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	45
2.8 HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT .....	46
2.9 SUMMARY .....	46
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	47

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	47
3.3 STUDY POPULATION .....	48
3.4 SAMPLE SIZE .....	49
3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE .....	50
3.6 INSTRUMENT AND DATA MEASUREMENT SCALE.....	51
3.7 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT .....	52
3.8 PILOT STUDY .....	55
3.9 PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS .....	55
3.9.1 NORMALITY ANALYSIS .....	55
3.10 DATA ANALYSIS .....	56
3.10.1 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS .....	56
3.10.2 MEASUREMENT SCALES .....	57
3.10.3 FACTOR ANALYSIS .....	57
3.10.4 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS .....	58
3.10.5 REGRESSION ANALYSIS .....	58
3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	59
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>60</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	60
4.2 DATA SCREENING.....	60
4.3 MISSING DATA.....	60
4.4 NORMALITY TEST.....	61
4.5 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS .....	61
4.5.1 RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.....	62
4.5.2 GENERAL INFORMATION .....	63
4.5.3 INDEPENDENT & DEPENDENT VARIABLE STATISTICS .....	65
4.6 MULTICOLLINEARITY ANALYSIS.....	68
4.7 FACTOR ANALYSIS.....	69
4.7.1 EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS.....	69
4.7.2 KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN (KMO) MEASURE OF SAMPLING ADEQUACY .....	70
4.7.3 BARTLETT'S TEST OF SPHERICITY .....	70
4.7.4 TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAIN .....	71
4.7.5 ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX .....	73
4.8 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS.....	74
4.9 REGRESSION ANALYSIS.....	76
4.9.1 REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON COEFFICIENT OF DETERMINATION (R <sup>2</sup> ).....	77
4.9.2 REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF ANOVA TEST .....	78
4.9.3 REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF COEFFICIENT.....	78
4.9.4 HYPOTHESIS TESTING.....	80
4.10 DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS .....	82
4.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER .....	85
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....</b>	<b>86</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION .....	86
5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	86
5.3 IMPLICATION .....	90

5.4 CONCLUSION .....	91
5.5 LIMITATION & RECOMMENDATION OF FUTURE RESEARCH .....	92
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Appendix I .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Appendix II.....</b>	<b>115</b>

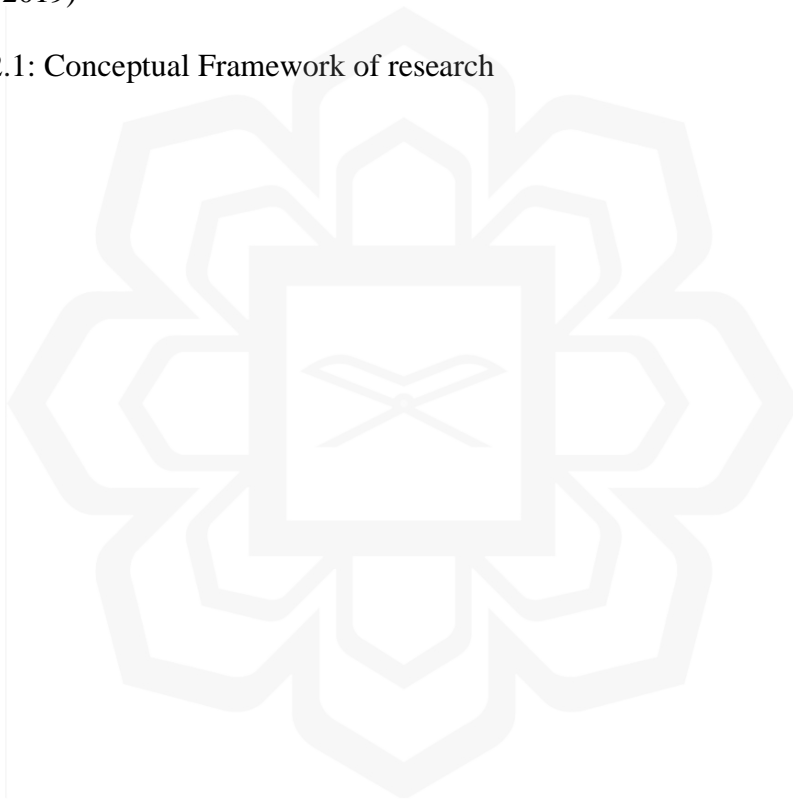


## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Public Higher Educational Institutions in Klang Valley	11
Table 3.1 Public Higher Educational Institutions in Klang Valley	49
Table 3.2 Summary of Questionnaire Items Adopted from Previous Research	53
Table 4.1 Normality Test Result	61
Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics On Demographic	62
Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics On General Information	64
Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics on Independent & Dependent variables	66
Table 4.4 Summary of Multicollinearity Coefficients	68
Table 4.5 KMO and Bartlett's Test	70
Table 4.6 Total Variance Explained Output	72
Table 4.7 Rotated Component Matrix	73
Table 4.8 Reliability Test	75
Table 4.9 Model Summary of Regression Analysis	77
Table 4.10 Regression Analysis of ANOVA test ANOVA	78
Table 4.11 Determinant Coefficient Of Customer Loyalty	79
Table 4.12 Summary of hypothesis testing results	82

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Higher Educational institutions in Malaysia	10
Figure 1.7: Campus Map of IIUM (Blogspot Sisaminah, 2017)	13
Figure 1.8: Campus Map of UPM (UPM Serdang, 2019)	15
Figure 1.9: YouGov survey ranking of different cuisine (Redraw) (YouGov Survey, 2019)	17
Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of research	45



## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
DV	Dependant Variable
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
IV	Independent Variable
K-S	Kolmogorov - Smirnov
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
S-W	Shapiro-Wilk
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Science
VIF	Variable Inflation Factor

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Education is a prestigious and rewarding asset which enables people in several ways. If the educational system is reliable and effective, students, who are the future of a nation, could possibly achieve greater performance. In great educational institution, the administration is usually willing to provide quality services which could lead to attracting brilliant and talented students. One element of the quality services is the food service provided in campus. Most students usually go to the cafeteria once every day. However, it is important to examine and understand their feedback about the food services in order to improve the service. This is not an easy task since the students and their choices are not necessarily constant. In the current research, some of the key elements which influence student's satisfaction, are identified which could be vital for improving the food service sector in universities.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

Educational Institutions not only provide bookish knowledge to learners but also shape their life in many ways. In a student's life apart from acquiring knowledge, students' welfare in terms of food intake plays a significant role (Zainol & Seladorai, 2016a). Eating is a daily necessary activity in every human's life. One of the most crucial element through which users or potential users perceive the superiority of some facility is the quality of food service (Serhan & Serhan, 2019). In the higher education sector, food service quality has become a crucial part which actively affects the campus life comfort and quality (El-Said & Fathy, 2015; Kwun, 2011). This area of research has

been so important that a lot of research done on university food service was aimed at the nutritional consumption of students consuming on campus food and the implications on their health (Ali et al., 2015; Staunæs et al., 2018; Symonds et al., 2013; Torres et al., 2015). Beside that, the aim of some other similar researches was on student's satisfaction regarding products, service and service environments of university food service (El-Said & Fathy, 2015; Joung et al., 2016; H. S. Kim et al., 2012; Park et al., 2013). The market of higher education is becoming more and more competitive (Staunæs et al., 2018). For students who want to acquire higher education nowadays, their focus should not be limited to local institutes. They can think globally, and the process is not very difficult. Since the context has become so much dynamic, the operators of university food service must adjust to the varying expectations of the students and staff. The food service needs to compete with both on campus and off campus food facilities (Giampaoli et al., 2014) and also with the uncertain economic trend of the market (Campbell et al., 2014). The research of Lugosi suggests that when the expectations of the customers are high, a more responsive approach is expected from the food services of campus (Lugosi, 2019).

When individuals live with family, their various habits are usually different. To pursue their education, they need to go to university and many of them stay in hostel especially when they go abroad. The majority of university students are over 18 years of age where a number of key life changes occur especially with regards to autonomy in food choice. Many tertiary students live away from their parents for the first time and they managing their own dietary need become a new sometime more challenging responsibility.

Evidence indicates that young adulthood is a critical period for the development of food behaviour which helps them to carry on into their life. Food service providers



should adjust to the demands of international students regarding food (Zainol & Seladorai, 2016a). Food services are an important component of nutrition that influences personal gratification of students and faculty at universities and colleges (Garg & Kumar, 2017). Canteen or cafeteria performs a significant role in day-to-day diet of many people including students. Well-balanced, satisfying and healthy diet is crucial to the busy students as well as the tight class schedule or a learning environment. It is a transitional life stage which may include momentous changes for many students who are going to the university (Czarniecka-Skubina et al., 2019). An important factor which the students are likely to consider in assessing their satisfaction is university food service. This is one of the important segments for students particularly those specially who live within the university campus (Aziz et al., 2017). The quality of the food provided by the cafeteria plays a vital role in influencing students' satisfaction through its presentation and taste. Expectation process quality and output quality influences the service quality element (Abdullah & Rozario, 2009). For maintaining on to current customers and turning them into loyal ones, food service sectors must go through continuous improvement in services as well as devote additional resources in order to attract new customers. It was highlighted in a research that shopping behaviour and purchase intention are greatly influenced by customer satisfaction (Noraishah et al., 2012).

Religion and ethnicity also influence food selection and satisfaction of customers. If the food available to the students do not appeal to them or seem inappropriate to them then it can raise dissatisfaction towards the institution. Even if it is not sure that a satisfied customer will return to the cafeteria again, it is almost confirmed that an unsatisfied customer most probably will never return to the cafeteria.

The aim of this study is to identify the factors which influence students' satisfaction about the cafeteria most. This knowledge can later be used for improving the system or understanding the area of improvement.

### **1.3 CONCEPT OF CAFE**

The cafeteria will forever be a place where students go to enjoy their meals after a long day, all the while chatting or socializing with friends. When students go to have lunch, they should have an enjoyable meal away from classroom restrictions and just relax for a while before the bell rings, forcing them to trudge back into the same monotonous routine. Healthy eating habits can be encouraged by good mealtimes and to get children to try out new items. In elementary schools, a child's fondest memory could be in a cafeteria. This is where they interact with other people and develop their social skills and behaviours which are gradually built up. Learning these quickly can help them in the later grades as well. It is also imperative to take note of discipline in a cafeteria. Adults resorting to excessive strict measures can potentially hamper a child's mental growth. The same might be applied to tertiary students. Usually in university life, many students learn to stay far away from their families. Since eating is a daily activity, if the environment of the cafeteria is not attractive, the new students might feel uncomfortable and suffer from depression. In university life, the behaviour of senior students also can significantly impact the newcomers' experience.

Some researchers think that healthy mealtime and social participation can help to create a positive environment in cafeteria which can help students in their occupational health (Heyne et al., 2012). Building a positive climate in the cafeteria is a collective effort of all the academic staff and parents. The cafeteria may be an unpleasant place to be if the students are not allowed to talk properly during meals or if

they feel pressured to eat quickly before their break is over. Moreover, the pressure to eat quickly may cause students to make poor food choices and lead to a wastage of food. Other disruptive behaviours, such as bullying, can often lead to the classroom. When the environment is more pleasing, students develop better appetite and can focus on their academic work. This helps in reducing behavioral problems (K. Stone et al., 2010). Different types of cafeteria models are present in both domestic and international practice (Foot et al., 2015; M.R. & H.R., 2004; M & J, 2017). A cafeteria is a special place even in workplaces. In a workplace, employees have to meet high standards to compete against their peers if they wish to expect better income and benefits. A good upside of the cafeteria is that the employer can cater to the various needs of employees (Poór et al., 2018).

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has been reported by Webber (2004) (Webber, 2004) that the food service industry amounts to \$1.3 trillion (US dollars), which is about RM 4.4 trillion (Malaysian ringgit), with an annual increase of 5% (Rodgers, 2007). Since the demand of the university food service must be kept up with the rising number of students, there is a high enrolment rate due to this (Y. S. Kim et al., 2006; Knutson, 2000). The overall university population is expected to rise by almost 22 million by the year 2015 (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). The rise of university students in Malaysia is evident from the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 where it is stated that the higher education enrolment in Malaysia is targeted to increase from 48% to 70% by 2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE), 2015). This large increase is expected to create more demand and provide competition to food service operators on and off campus (Garg & Kumar, 2017; White et al., 1992). Since there is such a high chance of reaping profits, the industry was expected to keep up with the high customer demands. However, this proved to not be the case.

In Malaysia, university food service operators have a daunting task of catering to a diverse and widely varied community of individuals, who are mostly living on campus and take their daily meals in the campus food outlets. Discontent may arise from on campus food services if the students are not satisfied with the overall quality of the items provided and they may resort to better options off campus. Hence why, do university food service operators are faced with the daily task of meeting up to consumer needs and expectations?

The cafeteria must be efficient in catering to the students, all the while trying to adapt and improve as the students' demand changes. Thus, the students' judgement of a cafeteria is an important factor to consider when striving for success in any higher learning institution (Radzuan, 2018). The importance of food service as a significant element of overall design and planning has been noticeable for a long time which was indicated by previous researchers (Klassen et al., 2005a; Kwon et al., 2018).

#### **1.4 STUDENT AS A CUSTOMER**

Marketing metaphors such as 'customer satisfaction' are widely used and there is some debate as to whether this term can be applied to students. In a study by Herbert, Dellana and Bassview, cited by Brennan & Bennington (Brennan & Bennington, 2000) , it is stated that there is some uncertainty as to who the primary customer is. The question mainly stems from the fact that there are so many different people a service caters to, from students and parents to a whole community, that it is difficult to specifically decide who the primary customer is. Other researchers stated that having students as customers in state funded universities might help in developing their leadership and course management abilities (Vuori, 2013). As cited by Brennan & Bennington, a researcher by the name of Deming (1986) stated that a customer is always the end user of a product

regardless of who pays (Brennan & Bennington, 2000). Since students typically consume the end product made by a cafeteria, which is the food, it is possible to say that they are the customers of cafeteria.

Modern service marketing theory supports that the customers themselves are an active contributor to the production process and they are partly accountable for the result. Hence, they are also responsible for their own satisfaction (Mark, 2013; B. Zeithaml et al., 2006). The environment of cafeteria does not fully depend on the cook and food server. It also depends on the students themselves. If the students who enjoy food in the cafeteria, do not behave properly with the service providers, they cannot expect to proper behaviour. This might lead to poor cafeteria environment. On the other hand, if the students behave themselves and maintain cleanliness in the cafeteria, then the cafeteria environment can be very pleasant.

Student enrolment rates are increasing rapidly in the tertiary education sector, and therefore, the demand for good quality is rising along with it (Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE), 2015). This is particularly prevalent in universities. This large increase in demand is putting considerable pressure on food service operators causing them to improve and, overall, meet the students' expectations due to intensive competition. It has been found that there are several other factors which determine students' satisfaction when choosing a food service to dine in. Customer satisfaction is one of the key points a business should take into account if is to be successful and, at the same time, has customers come back to it again and again (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). In a recent study it was found that customer satisfaction moderates the relationship between quality of service and customer retention.

Our current era is seeing an increase in amount of consumer spending and university undergraduate students play a major role in this. Hence why, do their

expectations for dining choices also increase with it (Kwun et al., 2013). According to the Euromonitor International (2007), it has been stated that the gradual economic growth of the food service sector has been subjected to, is mostly due to the increase in consumer income and living standards. The cafeteria is a vital part of university life and it is accepted as a place where people of different age, nationality, race, and religion can come to. All these elements come together to play a part in determining just how satisfied they are with the experience, and to see just how much a student supports the cafeteria (Kwun et al., 2013). Preceding studies have confirmed that, food service operators need to identify and better understand the factors affecting a customer's satisfaction if they want to effectively advertise their restaurant or cafeteria (Gramling et al., 2005).

Malaysia is a country of conspicuous multi-ethnicity. Malays being the largest group, there are two other major ethnic groups living in Malaysia. These other two major ethnic groups are Indian and Chinese who hold make up of 7% and 23% of the population respectively as recorded in 2010 (Lewison et al., 2016). Being a well-known multiracial country, the position of Malaysia can be considered as food paradise. It happened due to the synergistic effect of the intermingling of different ethnic groups. The culinary heritage of neighbouring countries also further enriches the food habit of Malaysia (Raji et al., 2017). This integration triggers a dynamic growth of cross cultured food preparation and consumption. The evidence of such matters can be found in numerous restaurants where food of different ethnic groups is found in the style of respective restaurants. In fact, it has become customary for many of these restaurants to keep food items for different ethnic group to quench the thirst of wide range of customers and their taste (Ishak et al., 2019).

Research work focusing on the effect of religiosity on the food consumption is expanding quickly. Religiosity often works as a motivating factor which can impact the customer behaviour such as food waste prevention. Since most of the people around the world are somehow related and influenced by religion, it can work as a motivating factor (Elshaer et al., 2021).

### **1.5 UNIVERSITY FACILITY IN KLANG VALLEY MALAYSIA**

The structure of educational institutions like universities consists of many fragments of services. Food, being the top basic need of human life, maybe considered very crucial. Needless to say, this service is measured and valued by students at universities as well as the parents who send these students to university for higher education and better future. More research-work needs to be done in order to understand diet facilities required by the students in a better way. While providing quality education is without any doubt the most decisive factor for bringing in more students to the institutions like universities, considering the cafeteria facilities with great care would be a supplementary charm for the students and their guardians. Moreover, the amount of students enrolled at universities is growing swiftly, which is initiates an explosive expansion of this sector (Garg, 2014). Since higher educational institutions like universities, that have a wide variety of offers, are much concerned about attracting and keeping students, the needs of university students become especially vital in the present time. Even though the importance of providing brilliant teaching is ultimate aim for these universities, there are numerous University administrators who perceive and put more value to the concept of providing complete services in a comprehensive campus where a fundamental part would be food service. Special attention is often crucial in case of food service because often sensitive issues like ethnicity and religion can be

closely related to food choice. The satisfaction towards the university can be affected by the food service. If students find the on campus food service unappealing, it may lead to dissatisfaction towards the university (Garg & Kumar, 2017).

Currently there are 88 public higher education institutions in Malaysia (Indicator, 2019).

Among them, the largest number of public higher education institutions are situated in Selangor State. Klang Valley is the biggest metropolitan of this state where 6 public higher education institutions are situated.

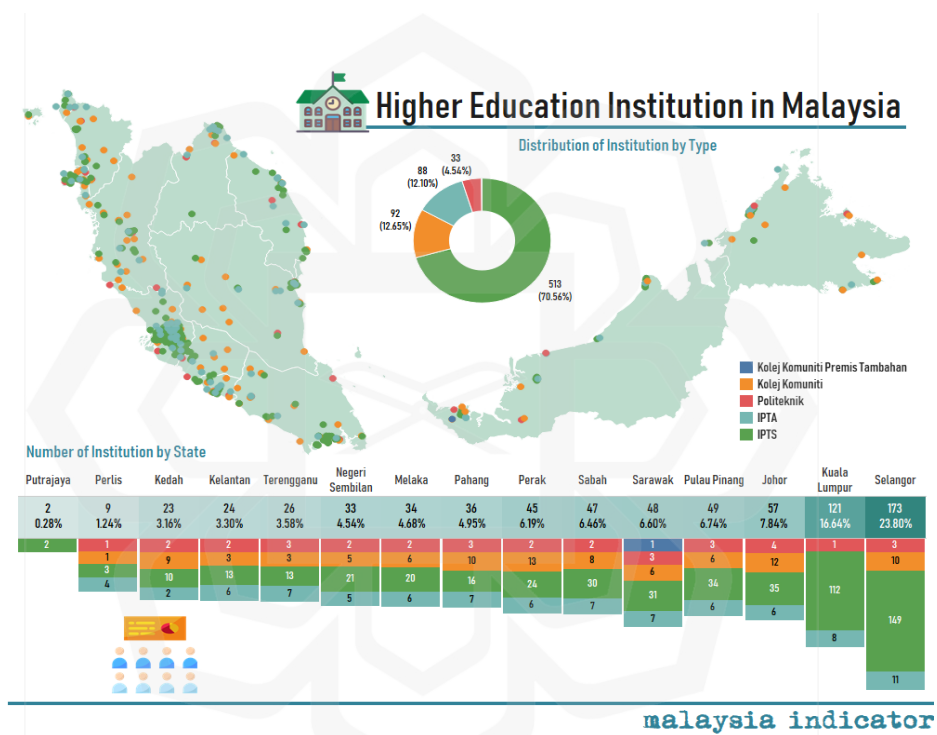


Figure 1.1: Higher Educational institutions in Malaysia

The distribution of Public Higher Education Institutions can be seen in the figure. Since the highest number of public higher education institutions is in Klang Valley, the research was conducted considering the universities in this area.

Klang Valley does not only have the best universities in Malaysia, but also it has some of the most reputable universities in the whole world. The name of the public