

ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL TOURISTS' SATISFACTION IN NORTHERN CYPRUS: ROLE OF FOOD CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Food, as an important parameter in tourism, has continued to gain traction. In parallel with desires and motivations of educational tourists, their food experience is also changing. It has also been proven that travelers tend to be more interested in tasting local food.

This paper plans to find out the importance of food in the tourism and hospitality field. The qualitative method of research was chosen for this experiment with researchers carrying out detailed interviews with their target participants to familiarize with the subject.

General Managers believe that food can be used to symbolize a specific area or community. In addition, food can be a source of attraction to educational tourists in North Cyprus.

Today, tourism is a major industry all around the world and governments try to attract more visitors each year. However, to achieve this, it is crucial to highlight the unique and core features that distinguish a destination from other places.

Keywords: Educational tourists, Food culture, Food quality, Service quality, Price, Ambiance

INTRODUCTION

Food has become an inseparable element of touristic experiences and is largely considered as a noteworthy component for tourist satisfaction evaluation. (Grbac & Milohanovic, 2008).

Local food, which is a concept currently becoming more popular among researchers, and has been deemed a motivating tourism factor, can be employed as a beneficial tool by different organizations and groups dealing operating in the tourism industry - from giant service providers to local restaurants.

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Although, it is well known that famous historical places appeal to tourists brilliantly, the local food culture plays a role as well. In fact, different places try to differentiate themselves utilizing unique cuisines rooted in their tradition. It is moreover embedded in the structures where put social and environmental issues in priority. The reasons food trends are of unique interest in current studies are in twofold. Food and food culture, primarily, can be motivators for tourists to visit a destination (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hillel et al., 2013), considering food tourism, search for food taste; unique moments and food experience are recent phenomena (Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2009).

Secondly, the concept of food culture has been gaining traction in terms of how it affects travellers' choice of destination. Local and international organizations are now faced with this newly appeared paradigm hence, focusing on local food tourism (Miroso & Lawson, 2012).

There are, although, myriads of research subjects dealing with tourism issues, and various theories have emerged, the lack of a clear explanation of the relationship between cultural tourism, educational tourists' expectations, the alimentary incidents and the final contentment can be seen providing the favourable time to fairly scrutinize.

Not only is food pleasure derived from its taste and pleasure, but also in sharing its experience with others. We can thus observe it in the region history, identification and in one word, culture history (Buiotti, 2011).

Characteristic features of food scrutinized those individual treats that permeate to a large scale of nutritional behaviours. One of the factors related to food, especially in terms of having connection with food choices, is the somewhat fear of tasting new aliments i.e. the user is not inclined to experience new cuisines especially food products, plates and aliments (Pliner & Hobden, 1992).

Food acts as an intimate bond between the history and culture of the host society and tourists; and much more important is that it is a worldwide phenomenon. It can serve as a language to communicate, share feelings, emotions and excitement. Not only is the pleasure of food via eating but also by sharing it with others. (Snidely, Espilar, & Shuls, 2011). In this present era, every cultural and historical trait has the potential of becoming a globetrotting and touristic product (Kim, Oveis & OScarles, 2019). Travelling is not considered a luxury and fancy subject; however, it is a usual part of life for many people (Bruluete & Giovani, 2014).

Food culture is one of the touristic factors that could play a significant role in attracting tourists. This sort of tourism is related to the culture and tradition of each country and it is highly attractive for visitors from other countries with different cultures, who are ready to experience a new culture, tradition and food (Yakinte & Laurence, 2013).

The preliminary background of this current study necessitates a thorough discernment of the mutual correlation between food related events and its possible impact on educational tourism, and to revisit an assessment of convenient publications.

In this research, we aim to survey on the relish and the tendency of student tourists in Cyprus and their passion for Cypriot dishes get measured; and what do they prefer in case of special times and lack of sufficient time for cooking? Do they go to restaurants to eat Cypriot foods or they stay at home to cook their favourite meal?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Tourism Organization had considered international students as tourists since 1963. According to World Tourism Organization (2012), educational tourists are defined as " individuals or groups who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than 24hrs and not more than one year". Although, they have several incentives like learning and business, Edu-tourists like to have leisure during their trip as well. It means that they look for a place where a combination of objectives is available.

Northern Cyprus educational sector had \$400 million income in 2011 with an expectation to increase over the following years (As cited in Harazneh, AL-Tall, AL-Zyoud, & Abubakar, 2018).

(Erik Cohen,1974). defined four distinct types of tourists. The different categories are related to the experience of tourists in a destination: organized mass tourist; individual mass tourist, explorer; and drifter. Considering these, the international students follow a similar procedure in terms of getting visa to move to a destination place, they can be classified as organized mass tourists.

Moreover, Cohen also classified the experience of tourists in a destination in five groups: recreational, diversional, experiential, experimental and existential. Although, the foreign students show similarities with experimental and existential tourists due to the fact that they try to fit in new culture, it is hard to categorize them as experimental and existential tourists. Rather, they have strong relations with their own culture and show experiential tourists' behaviour. In fact, they enhance their knowledge of the target destination. Hence, it is very important to classify worldwide academic persons in the right way. With this background, international students need something particular and are to be considered as special interest or 'niche' tourists. (Hall & Weiler, 1992).

Food tourism is a pioneer industry, with its literature going back to the year 2001, when the phrase "food and culinary tourism" was mentioned by the head of international food and culinary tourism union, "Erik Wolf", in an article (Wolf, 2012). For tourism with the purpose of food, there exists a variety of prevalent concepts such as cooking and food tourism, gastronomy tourism, culinary tourism and gourmet tourism. These can easily be expressed by a single definition: People who travel to a variety of destinations in order to taste a range of food flavors. However, beside foods, drinks are also included in food tourism (Kahuna & Ovilie, 2014).

There are a number of factors that have effects on Edu-tourists' destination selection. According to (Mazzarol, Kemp & Savery, 1996), one of the factors is

quality of the destination place. In addition, close relation between geography, language, history and culture of the destination and home can play a significant role in choosing a place to go (Harazneh, et. al, 2018).

Although, students who travel to another country for education suffer being far from their home, they choose it for several reasons which are not clearly being specified (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Realized that though high level of education is an important element for international students from Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India to decide where to go, they like to study to be more familiar with western culture. It reveals that, worldwide academic people prefer to study in destinations that are culturally attractive to them. Moreover, (Feifer&1985). via examples of students' experiences showed that pupils choose places that are culturally rich and enjoy activities such as language learning and art appreciation.

With this realization, in order to investigate international students' behaviour, interests and preferences, they should be considered as tourists in a different way. It means that, pupils who travel to other countries to study are tourists as they show similarities with other holidaymakers. However, they have firm relations with their mother culture and show conflicts with new culture. It means that, students prefer to be in a place for education that bears similarities with their mother culture. Thus, due to the unique and individual characteristics of international students, different aspects of their behaviours, they shall be considered as distinct tourists (Hall & Weiler, 1992).

According to conducted researches, only 8.1 percent of worldwide dishes were surveyed and verified by cooking experts; and declared as privileged dishes. The majority of people only pay attention to the taste and quality of their food and drink and not essentially considering eating in an expensive and select restaurant. The elitist food tourism has also a number of different subcategories attempting to discover outstanding foods and drinks like special chocolates or rare drinks. These fields are all subsets of the vast food industry, some of which are totally proficiencies and need a professional chef's skill (Hall & colleagues, 2013).

In the present time, the relations between adventurous tourism and food are constantly increasing day by day. This is in a way that approximately one-third of adventurous tour operators say that their passengers asked them to add new unknown food types as a part of their travelling experience. The international community of adventurous travelling trade has recently published the result of a wide study based on a survey on 281 domestic and foreign tour operators and travel agencies from 54 countries that serve adventurous travelling services to more than 3300 travellers per year (Kim and colleagues, 2019).

The number of tourists who are more prone to food is increasing (Bjork & Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2016). Therefore, food and food culture can play a significant role in tourism attraction. The concept of local food is very popular as different places are differentiated from others when they are compared with their variety and availability of distinct cuisine. Local dishes have ties with local areas and are not separable from local culture and history (Bjork & Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2016).

Experience is a key factor that has inevitable impacts on visitor satisfaction and intention to come back to a destination. Moreover, as Lee, Sung, (Suh & Zhao, 2017). Studies indicated; satisfaction is the final perception of a customer from the destination. Thus, it is very important to be acquainted with their experiences in tourism and hospitality industry.

Tour operators now have a better comprehension of food as a non-digital object, which is entirely a physical experience that requires one to be present in its location to taste and drink. Food experience can also be seen as a supplementary part of tours and tour operators are able to provide a range of variable packages to select and buy-a totally different travelling package with common similar forms and activities that are also much more competitive.

Several studies prove the presence of a significant impact of physical environment or service quality on corporate image. Food quality, service quality, interior design and décor, restaurant location and wait time all have effects on restaurant image. Thus, it is crucial to have high quality food and service to preserve gained image (Ryu, Lee & Kim, 2012). Moreover, customer satisfaction positively impacts behavioural intentions like buying back and word of mouth communication (Han & Ryu, 2009).

Food tourism is one of the basic elements of tourist's behaviour in relation with a destination (Getz, Robinson, Andersson & Vujicic, 2014). Based on the work of Bessiere (1998), the behaviour of the customer towards local food is both entertaining and cultural. In other words, students prefer to be in a place for education that bears similarities with their mother country. In fact, they understand the similar characteristics of the new culture including food and cuisine with their own and prefer to select places with strong academic background and familiar cultural traditions.

This research aims to investigate the proper way of understanding international students' experience in Northern Cyprus. In addition, how the local food culture affects the foreign students' satisfaction and analysis the conflicts between their local food culture and their food experiences in North Cyprus. The nature of their experiences focusing on incentives and reasons for their move as tourists and students at the same time is a better approach to have a thorough perception of what they experience. In this context, the role of local food and food culture should not be neglected as it affects the destination's attractiveness. Thus, the present study concentrates on both educational and social experience of international students living and studying in Northern Cyprus and the factors that have positive impacts on their intention to come back. The data will be gathered from foreign students who study in EMU.

SUBJECTIVE BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

In the recent decades, internet development has resulted in turning to an efficient advertising media enhancing tourism development in a potential way. And food tourists' searches to outreach and produce, are based on different customers'

satisfaction. In order to get familiar with food and cuisine tourism products in the world, some points are need to be mentioned.

Starting with Europe, undoubtedly Italy is the most well-known country for its food and cuisine. A part of its touristic exportation is in this area; where you can taste Venice risotto, Milan brawn dish, pasta, and truffle cheese, various types of vegetables, beverages, oil, fresh fish, ice-cream and gelato. In France, they serve a variety of more than 500 types of coffee and different cities have plenty of cafes. Catalanian cuisine in Spain, the best of which you can find in Barcelona, is one of those attractions, which gathers tourists from all around the world in this region. Barcelonan style was generated from using saffron, green cumin and other spices and traditional foods. Sea foods and meat with a lot of sauce is the art of the chefs of this area (German & colleagues, 2007). If we go to northern, central and southern America, New York city would be one of the best food and cuisine tourism destinations, not only to taste the top worldwide dishes, which may be even better cooked than their original samples, but also due to its cheap and stunning local foods like pasteurizing sandwiches. Mexico City is also so famous that the tourists with hot palate always take it into consideration as one of the main destinations, and Peru as a country having numerous diet foods, implement a range of strategies in order to attract food and cuisine tourists (Berlet & Giovani, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Since the purpose of this study is exploratory and exponential, a qualitative method was chosen for this research. An in-depth interview with the target participants helps researchers to have a better understanding of the subject. Based on the work of Taggard (2009), having conversation with interviewees leads to new knowledge. Through the interviews with monitors, we can explore new cases. Thus we think a qualitative approach is the most useful method in this case. Therefore, the primary method for this research will be sample data collected from 8 interviews conducted in North Cyprus within spring 2018, with the aim to find a reliable and trustworthy answer for our questions.

In this research, qualitative method was used and its accomplishment algorithm is described in **(Figure 1)**.

In qualitative research, sampling is targeted, and interviewee are selected between the persons who give the best information about the research. Therefore, for this research, 8 persons who have food experiences in North Cyprus were selected for interview.

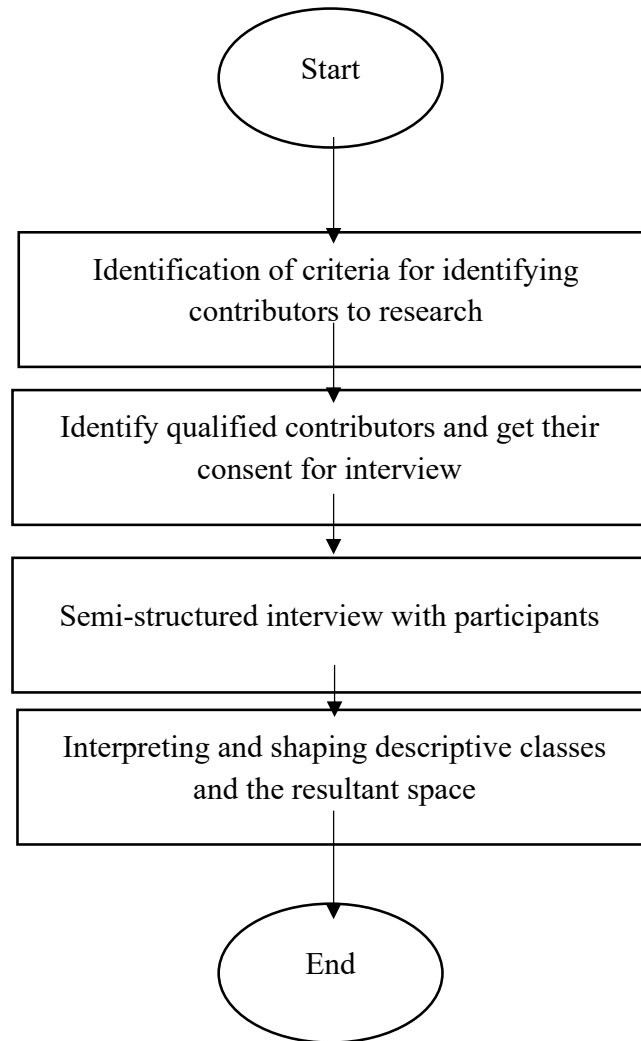


Figure 1: Method of conducting research.

Interviews characteristics is mentioned in **Table 1** and **Table 2**.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of interviewees.

Interviewee	Education background in N. Cyprus	Sex
1 Person	years3	M
2 Person	years2	M
3 Person	years3	F
4 Person	years4	M
5 Person	years2	F
6 Person	4 years	M
7 Person	1 month	F
8 Person	2 years	M

In this research, the participants were asked to mention the factors that play a role in food tourism culture. Then they were asked for more essential explanation to clarify their purposes and ideas. After the interview with the participants, the responses were examined carefully and descriptive classes were formed via codlings and analysis. Data analysis was in repeated method in order to achieve the descriptive classes with most adoption based on the interviewee's data.

Table 2: Criteria for assessing interviewees.

	Important food criteria	Cypriot food feelings	Restaurant or Home
Interviewee 1	Food quality – Food Price	No Healthy food (oily)	Home(lack of food quality in restaurants)
Interviewee 2	Restaurant Design – Service quality	No Healthy food (oily)	Home(lack of food quality in restaurants)
Interviewee 3	Restaurant Design – Service quality	Good food diversification –No healthy food	Home
Interviewee 4	Price	Good food diversification	Restaurant
Interviewee 5	Customer Orientation	Lack of good service	Restaurant
Interviewee 6	Restaurant Design – Service quality	No healthy food	Home(lack of food quality in restaurants)
Interviewee 7	Food quality – Service Quality	No healthy food guarantee	Restaurant
Interviewee 8	Customer Orientation – Food Quality	High Diversification base on Cyprus food culture	Home(lack of food quality in restaurants)

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS RESULT

Firstly, data were extracted from all interviews, then, all the analysis were classified and at the end, similar concepts were defined in groups. Results from first to third step of research is mentioned in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Classification of information related to interviews.

	Elements	Group
1	Negative view of managers and staff to tourism industry	Lack of expert view to the food industry development
2	Lack of handling and controlling all the branches because of numerous numbers of restaurants	Lack of expert human resources in food industry
3	Lack of providing the essential infrastructure for food health	Not paying attention to tourism food industry
4	Lack of essential food tourism culture	Lack of healthy food culture
5	Lack of understanding the concept of the food industry in tourism	Lack of expert view in food industry development
6	Lack of customer orientation system	Lack of expert view in food industry development
7	The inadequate position of the food industry in a customer orientation	Lack of expert human resources in food industry
8	Mismatching the essential needs of restaurants for tourists	Not paying attention to tourism food industry
9	High food prices	Lack of controlling of prices
10	Lack of paying attention to the tourism as an industry	Lack of expert view to the food industry development
11	Lack of open ways for the expert human resources in order to entering to the food tourism industry	Lack of expert view to the food industry development
12	Lack of food culture in order to attract the tourists	Lack of expert human resources in food industry
13	Low service quality	Not paying attention to tourism food industry
14	lack of good and attractive restaurant interior and outdoor design	Lack of expert view to the food industry development
15	Not paying attention to food health	Not paying attention to tourism food industry
16	Not paying attention to food quality	Lack of expert human resources in food industry
17	Lack of will to develop food tourism industry	Lack of expert view to the food industry development
18	Low level of food diversification for tourists	Not paying attention to food diversification

After understanding the different groups among the concepts, in the fourth step, each of the groups was classified in another category, the results are clear in

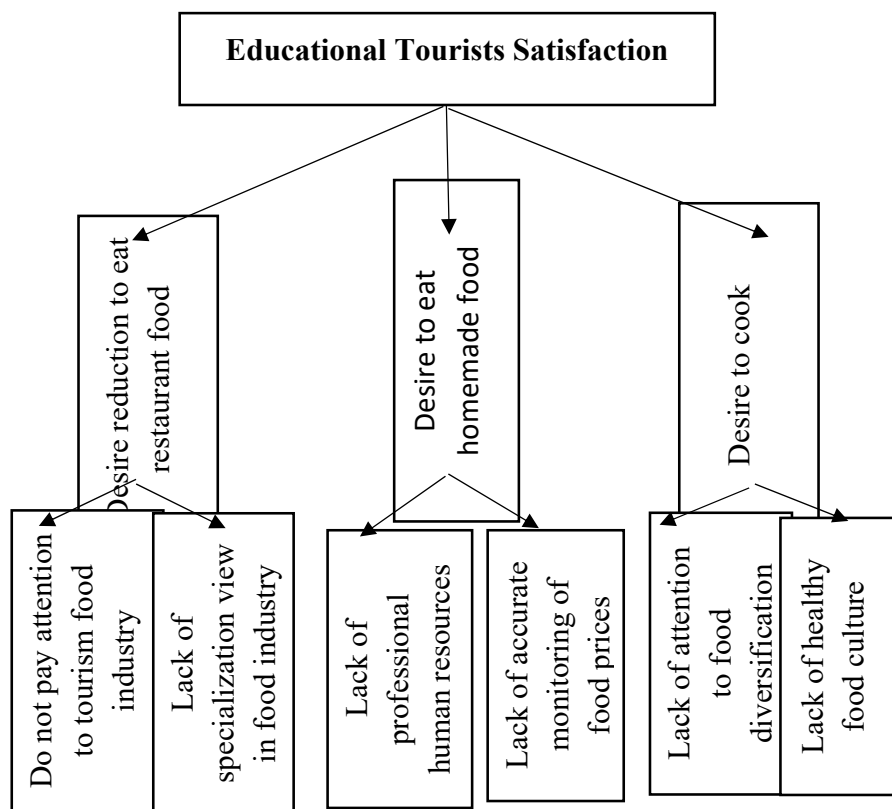
Table 4. It should be noted that, given that in the previous stage we tried to interview the students on different levels and as tourists, the group classification was also done on this basis.

Table 4: Summary of information related to interviewees.

	Group	Option
1	Not paying attention to tourism food industry	Reduction of desire to eat at Restaurants
2	Lack of expert view to the food industry development	
3	Lack of expert human resources in food industry	desire to eat homemade foods
4	Lack of price controlling and monitoring	
5	not paying attention to food variety in menus	Desire to cook personally
6	Lack of healthy food culture	

Base on the results, food satisfaction among students in North Cyprus as educational tourists is demonstrated in **chart 1**.

Chart 1: Educational Tourists Satisfaction Model.



A lack of specialist looks at food industry development.

One of the food industry issues for tourists in the private food section obviously is the absence of a specialist look toward this industry e.g. A single person is both the owner (investor) and CEO. In this method, the investor and owner has not enough knowledge about the industry hence, it causes subsections to be managed in an unpleasant way. Furthermore, the entrance of different private enterprises with a wide range of scattered activities and decentralization on one or more specific activities in order to create a competitive privilege is another defect of this issue.

A lack of professional human resource in food industry

Concerning service in the food industry human resource plays a vital role in rendering services in the industry. One of the major obstacles of food tourism industry is the lack of specialist human resource in this industry, which has invariably caused a decline in food services quality. Insufficient education, loss of specialist professors in tourism, ineffective tourism system and lack of a strategic program for human resource industry and not following the meritocracy system in attracting human resource to the industry are all underlying reasons for not having professional staff in this industry.

Not taking serious the food tourism industry

According to experts, one of the most important issues faced in food tourism is its neglect, which has resulted in a severe ignorance in immense planning such as developed programs. Although today, the food tourism industry is considered very important on a worldwide scale and based on the declaration of travel and tourism universal council, the association of tourism industry in terms of world gross production is 9 percent and its revenue reached about 8 trillion in the year 2018. Many domestic activists in this industry talk about the neglect towards this as an industry and the uneconomic effects it brings. The lack of attention to this industry has caused refusal of huge and private establishments to invest in it.

A lack of healthy cuisine culture

One of the present issues in food tourism industry especially in attracting foreign tourists is not having the needed culture of the tourism industry. Today, there's increased political and security attitudes towards tourists, considering them as enemies or spies or as a bunch of corruption that its presence is considered a virus enhancing corruption in the society and disparity of urban culture. This includes not considering service to tourists as something precious in the public culture of the city and officials supporting organizations' inappropriate behaviors towards foreign tourists.

Lack of precise observation in food prices

Another issue in private sector is the absence of a plenary observing system over the private costing part of the food industry. It has generated actions by some activists in this area due to the damaged reputation of the tourism industry because of personal benefits.

One of the points that has been ignored in the food tourism industry in Cyprus is the tourists' power of selection. The fact that tourists check their options and choose among alternatives, options that render more pleasant service with more reasonable prices. While apart from plenty of limitations and not serving appropriately based on worldwide standards, immoderate expenses have hindered tourists from choosing Cyprus as their destination.

RESULTS

In order to achieve balanced outcomes, respondents were chosen among men and women sharing similar interests. All the interviewees studied at Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta. Interviewees had lived in Northern Cyprus for at least about a year. The focus of the present study was to look at the role of food culture on educational tourists' satisfaction in Northern Cyprus. This study also intended to investigate the role of food quality, service quality, price, and ambiance on the degree of satisfaction of educational tourists in Northern Cyprus.

The results proved significant for all four factors related to service quality of eating houses in shaping the concluding image. Price and food quality, although, have substantial effects on value perception of educational tourists they are unlikely to be influenced by pleasant atmosphere and high quality service which is another side of the story in comparison with previous studies.

All respondents generally gave positive feedbacks about their food experience in Cyprus except one. They all, however, complained about unhealthy cooking, foods fried in oils and consumption of lots of sausages.

Most of the respondents named at least two Cypriot traditional dishes they would like to have a second time and missed them a lot. Having enough time, the students often prefer to cook their own dishes at home. The price is the first factor for them considering they have a limited budget and expenses in North Cyprus are above average when compared with their own countries.

All respondents found similarities between their mother culture and the new food culture especially in terms of raw ingredients and recipes. The majority of the individuals pointed out that Cypriot food culture suffer from poor diversity. The restaurant architecture, moreover, did not strike the viewer in any unique way. The surrounding atmosphere and the weather to some of the students, however, built a pleasant sense motivating them to sit and enjoy meals outside. Men were more inclined to have meal out in a restaurant than women did, as they were not familiar with cooking. A minority of the respondents were favorably looking for home-cooked cuisines.

The outcome of this research has been scrutinized through a variety of societies' point of view, in order to extract student tourists' tendency for Cypriot food culture by the implementation of the basis theory. To clarify, despite the fact that there are plenty of beautiful tourist attractions in this area and choosing it as a tourism center, the programming, research and survey, marketing, substructure and welfare facilities, health and hygiene, faded cultural attractions and lack of proper

human resource all pose as major problems. In other words, apart from the present numerous attractions in this region, there exists no coded program with an attention to advertisement and improving its foods quality. To conclude, with regards to the research findings, some suggestions for improvement are going to be made:

- Studies with a systematic and holistic attitude with qualitative paradigms and preventing from cliché.
- More investment in tourism substructures field with local emphasis.
- Asking for tourists' help in cooperating and organizing questionnaire in order to manage the affairs and self-oriented regional tourism.
- Marketing and performing ecotourism tours. Pay attention to food industry and educating professional and passionate individuals in tourism and local nutrition industry.

In advance, the results of this research can be effective in development of restaurants and fast foods status in Cyprus. Here, the outcomes of a model has got examined after discovering it and determined what factors have caused the present not acceptable food condition in Cyprus. With the study of these defects and solving them, we can provide a good and appropriate opportunity for attracting tourists with the help of food.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study is in some way similar to previous studies but hospitality literature is the focus here. Chow et al. (2007) studied the relationship among three aspects of service quality and the impact of three aspects of food service quality on customer satisfaction. The major differences of this present study and previous ones are as follows;

First, the major focus of this study is to find out how educational tourists perceived food service quality and its influence on their perceived image towards the destination.

Second, the number of studies on the importance of food image is so small.

Ryu et al. (2008)'s study is the only one investigating the relationship between restaurant image and outcome variables such as customer value, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

All four components of restaurant service quality have important impacts on restaurant image and matter to educational tourists' perceived image about Cypriot restaurants. Thus, the relative importance of these parameters with regards to restaurant image should be understood by restaurant managers for better understanding of each elements' role. According to this study, except for these four components, in Cypriot restaurants, quality of food and the price have the greatest contributions to the restaurant image. Good food in an affordable price attracts

educational tourists to a restaurant (Namkung & Jang, 2007). This study opines that, to have a good image for a restaurant, the quality of food should be the first priority and then the price.

Apart from quality of food, enjoyable environment and good service have positive impacts on restaurant image especially for educational tourists, hence the managers should use these two components in establishing a desired image.

On the other hand, offering a reasonable price for the students may proceed to satisfaction for educational tourists. For instance, offering annual food packages from the restaurants especially the local ones with the less price of individual food may attract the students who are living in that region and do not have time to cook every day and these kinds of offers with the reasonable price may encourage them to use them.

Also, restaurant managers can make some agreements with the universities and academic institutions in their region to offer the especial meal on the campus for the students. These types of meal promotions will cause a win-win situation for both restaurants and universities and on the other side of the coin will be beneficial for the students in terms of saving time and money.

LIMITATIONS

This study was carried out within a limited period of time. Thus, there were difficulties holding interviews. It is suggested to have more interviews to bring about results that are more accurate. Target group, moreover, were students, future studies can be done on other categories of tourists.

The results showed that price and food quality were the most influential factors on educational tourists. This study suggests a further study on the impact of food diversity on such tourists. Understanding personal characteristics also, is another factor that could be scrutinized in further investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to measure the level of educational tourists' satisfaction concerning their food experience in North Cyprus. An interview with educational tourists in EMU in Famagusta helped us gather valuable information. Four different parameters of food quality, service quality, environment and the price generally defined the customers' satisfaction which reflects the value of this menu in North Cyprus.

The results of this study were examined from several perspectives to extract student visitors' preferences for Cypriot cuisine using the foundation theory. All four parameters linked to eating house service quality were shown to have a substantial impact on the final image. Although price and food quality have significant effects on educational visitors' value perceptions, they are unlikely to be swayed by a nice ambiance and high-quality service, which is a different side of the story in comparison to prior studies.

It was proved that restaurant image is built by the combination of these four parameters while the food quality and its price have more important impacts, which were interestingly incompatible with earlier experiments. Another achievement of this experiment is that educational tourists' satisfaction depends on their food culture.

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