



# An exploration on service interactions with the differently-abled employees in food service industry

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## Abstract

This study assessed the interaction challenges faced by differently-abled employees and the level of customer satisfaction in the food service industry in the selected 1st and 2nd districts of Quezon, Philippines. Using a mixed-method approach and purposive sampling, data were gathered from 385 customers and five differently-abled employees in a selected restaurant. Data collection involved the use of questionnaires and informal structured interviews. The collected data were subjected to appropriate statistical analyses to support the development of a training plan. Results indicated that customers were generally satisfied with the responsiveness and empathy demonstrated by differently-abled employees. However, there were varying perceptions regarding assurance, tangibility, and reliability among the customers. Differently-abled employees reported minimal difficulties in service interactions despite their disabilities. This study raises awareness and encourages the food service sector to value and include workers with disabilities in their workforce. The findings validate the idea that individuals with disabilities can perform effectively in customer-facing roles and contribute positively to the customer experience. As a result, the study advocates for inclusive hiring practices and the development of training programs tailored to the specific needs of differently-abled employees.

**Keywords:** *differently-abled employees, service quality, customer satisfaction, food industry*

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## 1. Introduction

Finding and keeping a job can be challenging for many individuals with disabilities. According to estimates, 1.44 million people in the Philippines, or approximately 1.57% of the country's total population, suffer from some form of disability (Velasco et al., 2021). Most individuals with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, placing them in financially unstable situations and adding to their already heavy burdens. Despite these challenges, some businesses in the Philippines, particularly in the food service sector, have employed persons with disabilities.

As the food service industry in the Philippines continued to expand, more job opportunities became available for the growing number of people with disabilities. Many restaurants and other food service establishments began hiring dedicated individuals with disabilities to deliver excellent service. This research aimed to examine how customers and employees with disabilities interact in the food service industry. Specifically, it sought to investigate the service interactions between customers and differently-abled employees, identify the challenges these employees face, and determine the level of customer satisfaction that signifies successful service delivery.

Numerous findings from recent international studies have shown that both customers and employees with disabilities report positive perceptions of their service encounters in cafés and restaurants. Employees with disabilities viewed the opportunity to engage with customers as fulfilling. It allowed them to demonstrate genuine hospitality, attention to detail, and a strong desire to make a lasting impression. Moreover, they appreciated the social connections formed with customers, which increased their motivation to work and live independently (Doan et al., 2023). From the customers' perspective, the findings of related studies reflected a notable degree of appreciation for the services rendered by employees with disabilities.

In the Philippine context, existing research has primarily focused on service interactions and customer satisfaction involving employees without disabilities. However, this study reveals that workers with disabilities contribute significantly to the workplace by investing more of themselves in service delivery. Due to the limited research on this subject, a gap exists in understanding the unique challenges faced by differently-abled employees during customer interactions, as well as how they maintain a high standard of service. Previous studies have mostly examined the factors affecting the employability of persons with disabilities in general business environments, rather than their specific performance in the hospitality sector.

Thus, the goal of this study was to explore and evaluate the service interactions between customers and differently-abled employees in the food service industry. The main objectives were to identify the challenges that these employees may encounter in interacting with customers, assess their effectiveness in service delivery, and determine the level of customer satisfaction with their performance. Both customers and differently-abled employees were included as respondents to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these challenges might be addressed.

## 2. Literature Review

According to previous research, service quality is a key determinant of customer satisfaction in the food service industry, particularly in restaurants. Customer satisfaction is often an overall evaluation based on prior service experiences with differently-abled employees. Therefore, ensuring high-quality service interactions is essential and can be measured through the SERVQUAL model (Cheng Chia-Hsin, 2020). Additionally, firms may feel more confident hiring differently-abled employees if they can demonstrate that these employees deliver quality service. This highlights an underutilized talent pool that can address high turnover in the food service industry (Doan et al., 2023). Kalargyrou et al. (2020) emphasized that service quality results from the alignment of customer and employee perceptions.

Because only customers fully experience service delivery in real time, measuring their satisfaction is vital. Evidence of quality service from differently-abled employees can reduce perceived risks for employers. Moreover, hiring a diverse workforce reflects the evolving needs of an aging population and enhances a company's image as socially responsible (Christou et al., 2019). Inclusive workplaces also help businesses comply with employment quota laws, which may require hiring a minimum number of employees with disabilities (Santuzzi et al., 2022).

### 2.1 Components of SERVQUAL

**Responsiveness.** Responsiveness measures how promptly and efficiently employees meet customer needs. It includes timely service and accurate order fulfillment, which are crucial for enhancing customer experience (Korach, 2023). Differently-abled employees should be attentive and proactive in addressing customer needs (Hamel, 2023). Doan et al.

(2023) observed that differently-abled employees not only performed their duties but also aimed to deliver memorable experiences with sincerity and enthusiasm, boosting customer confidence and motivation for other employees.

**Assurance.** Assurance refers to the ability of differently-abled employees to inspire customer trust and confidence by being polite, knowledgeable, and safe during interactions. Politeness and genuine hospitality foster positive customer relationships (Noorani, 2024). Training includes key service gestures like welcoming and engaging customers, which build rapport and trust (Doan et al., 2023). Personalized and authentic service contributes significantly to customer assurance (Bishop, 2023).

**Tangibility.** Tangibility involves the physical aspects of service, such as facilities, appearance, and equipment. Appealing visuals, well-dressed staff, and modern tools influence customer perception (Wang & Lang, 2019). Tangibility helps communicate service quality and can build strong customer associations (Ali et al., 2021).

**Empathy.** Empathy is the ability to understand and address customer needs personally and attentively. It reflects the human aspect of service (Johnson, 2018). Doan et al. (2023) found that differently-abled employees were often more enthusiastic and attentive, and customers noted better service in establishments that hired them.

**Reliability.** Reliability is the consistent and accurate delivery of promised services. It is a top determinant of service quality, particularly in fast food (Kumolu-Johnson, 2024). Reliable service promotes customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Adiele & Kenneth-Adiele, 2018). Johnson (2018) emphasized that reliability reflects a provider's long-term commitment to meeting expectations.

## ***2.2 Factors Affecting Service Delivery of Differently-Abled Employees***

Trang (2022) noted that personal characteristics influence service quality. Doan et al. (2023) found that shared traits between employees and customers improved understanding and empathy, while Sommerlad et al. (2021) linked empathy with life satisfaction. Viviani et al. (2021) contrasted young workers' enthusiasm with older workers' experience and critical thinking. Most differently-abled employees in the food industry belong to Generations Y and Z, known for their goal-oriented behavior.

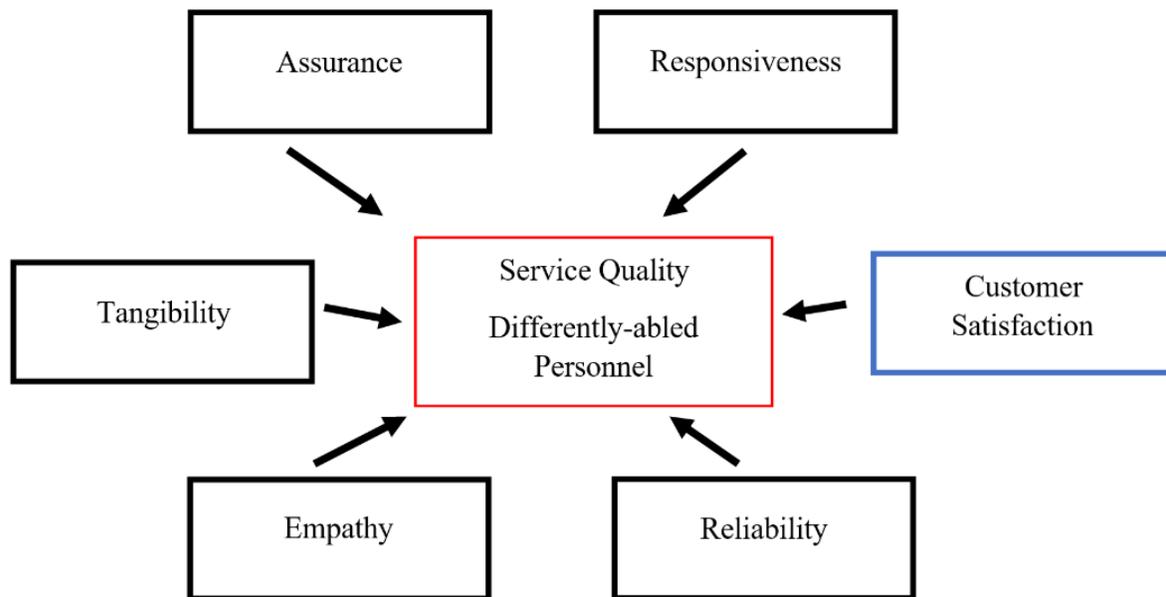
Differently-abled employees contribute professionalism and value to the food sector. In the Philippines, brands like Jollibee, Chow King, Mang Inasal, and Greenwich employ deaf

and silent workers in customer service roles. Some establishments highlight successful integration. Doan (2023) identified skill development as a key challenge due to a lack of vocational training and formal education. Discrimination and inexperience also hinder performance, despite laws like the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities. The nature of disability poses inherent challenges. The International Labour Organization (2017) emphasized the need to combat negative attitudes and misinformation. Communication is a common challenge. While hearing-impaired employees may struggle, human behavior and relationships are significant barriers, especially for those with dwarfism. Chaudhuri (2022) and Narayanan (2018) reported that communication and physical appearance are recurring issues for differently-abled employees (Kim & Baker, 2020).

### 2.3. Theoretical Framework

**Figure 1**

*Service quality dimensions in measuring customer satisfaction*



The SERVQUAL Model Theory was used as a supporting framework in this study. SERVQUAL is a widely recognized model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry to assess service quality. Introduced in 1988, the model examines various dimensions of service quality based on customer perceptions and expectations. It enables businesses to evaluate and manage the quality of their services through tools such as questionnaires, surveys,

and other qualitative research methods. By measuring the gap between customer expectations and actual experiences, industries like food service—particularly restaurants—can identify areas for improvement and prioritize their efforts accordingly. Implementing the SERVQUAL model can lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately enhancing long-term business performance.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

The research questions were addressed using a descriptive design and a mixed-method approach. A mixed method refers to a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and integrating both quantitative and qualitative research components within a single study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### 3.2. Population and Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling—also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling—is a type of non-probability sampling wherein researchers use their judgment to select participants who are most relevant to the study. Cochran’s formula was used to compute the sample size in the absence of a known total population. Following this formula, the default sample size of 385 was applied.

**Table 1**

*Demographic profile of the customer-participants*

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	214	55.6 %
Male	171	44.4 %
<b>Age</b>		
Boomers (57-75)	18	4.7 %
Gen. X (41-56)	77	20.0 %
Gen. Y or Millennials (25-40)	163	42.3 %
Gen. Z (18-24)	127	33.0 %

**Table 2***Demographic profile of the differently-abled participants*

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	2	40.0%
Male	3	60.0%
<b>Age</b>		
Gen. X (41-56)	1	20.0%
Gen. Y or Millennials (25-40)	4	80.0%
<b>Type of Disability</b>		
Visual Impairments	2	40.0%
Physical Disability	3	60.0%
<b>Highest Educational Attainment</b>		
Secondary	3	60.0%
College Graduate	2	40.0%
<b>Length of Service</b>		
5-10 years	1	20.0%
More than 10 years	4	80.0%

Due to the nature of qualitative data collection, the study was able to identify and tabulate the target respondents. This was also influenced by the limitation that the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) did not have specific data on persons with disabilities employed in the food industry; therefore, only five (5) samples were used for qualitative data collection.

The study respondents included customers who dined at the selected five (5) restaurants in Quezon's 1st and 2nd districts and had service encounters with differently-abled employees. The respondents were evaluated based on the challenges faced by differently-abled employees during customer interactions, levels of customer satisfaction with the service provided by differently-abled employees using SERVQUAL dimensions, and the success concepts shared by differently-abled employees working in the food service industry.

### **3.3. Research Instrument**

This study employed a researcher-made survey questionnaire for customers and informal, structured interviews for differently-abled employees. The customer questionnaire was divided into two (2) parts. The first section captured demographic information such as age and gender, answered through checkboxes. The second section assessed customer satisfaction

with the service provided by differently-abled employees using SERVQUAL dimensions, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and reliability, measured on a Likert scale.

The interview guide for differently-abled employees consisted of three (3) sections. The first section collected demographic information, including sex, age, type of disability, highest educational attainment, and length of service. The second section focused on the challenges faced by differently-abled employees during customer interactions. The final section explored the employees' perceptions of success while working in the food service industry.

### ***3.4. Data Gathering Procedure***

Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to customers who dined in the selected restaurants and interacted with differently-abled employees, as well as through informal, structured interviews conducted with differently-abled employees working in the food service sector. Prior to data collection, the research adviser reviewed and validated the research instruments. After approval, a letter of request was sent to the selected restaurants in Quezon's 1st and 2nd districts that employed differently-abled workers. The research instruments were then distributed in a guided manner. Responses from the respondents were organized for statistical analysis using appropriate statistical tools.

### ***3.5. Statistical Treatment of Data***

The collected data were subjected to statistical treatments to facilitate analysis and interpretation. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 28. For the qualitative portion, thematic analysis was conducted, with coding of responses as the initial step.

### ***3.6. Research Ethics***

This study received approval from the designated ethics review board and adhered strictly to established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and welfare. All participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Informed consent was obtained, affirming that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Data collected from participants were treated with strict confidentiality,

anonymized through proper coding, and stored securely with access limited to authorized personnel only. The information gathered was used solely for academic purposes, ensuring that the identities of participants and their families remained protected. Throughout the research process, ethical standards and integrity were upheld, and all data were responsibly disposed of upon completion of the study to prevent any misuse or unauthorized access.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Table 3 presents the single-factor ANOVA on customer satisfaction regarding responsiveness.

**Table 3**

*Customer satisfaction in terms of responsiveness*

Groups	Count	Sum	Mean	Variance	Rank
1. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee responds to my needs quickly.	385	1399	3.6338	0.2692	5
2. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee addressed my concerns and questions promptly.	385	1400	3.6364	0.2737	2
3. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee offer wholehearted sincere service.	385	1409	3.6597	0.2407	3
4. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee makes an effort to understand and attend to my needs.	385	1409	3.6597	0.2563	3
5. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee is aware of the value of time when I need assistance during service contact.	385	1410	3.6623	0.2607	1

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F critical
Between Groups	0.3044	4	0.0761	0.2926	0.8829	2.3766
Within Groups	499.4078	1920	0.2601			
Total	499.7122	1924				

Based on the data, the highest mean score among the five items was 3.6623, indicating that customers were most satisfied with the perception that differently-abled employees recognized the value of time when customers needed assistance during service interactions. Conversely, the lowest mean score was 3.6338, referring to customer satisfaction with how quickly differently-abled employees responded to their needs. The computed p-value was 0.8829, which is higher than the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This suggests that there was no

statistically significant difference between the mean scores, indicating that all factors were considered equally important by the respondents.

These findings show that customers consistently expressed positive views regarding the responsiveness of differently-abled employees. This indicates that such employees are capable of providing timely assistance, meeting service demands and expectations, and minimizing complaints about service quality. Putta (2023) suggested that customer satisfaction with responsiveness stems from the ability of differently-abled employees to deliver quality food quickly during peak hours, provide prompt and adaptable services, and show a strong willingness to help guests. Likewise, Doan et al. (2023) emphasized that the attentiveness of differently-abled employees enhances their ability to anticipate customer needs and offer timely support.

Responsiveness plays a crucial role in achieving high levels of customer satisfaction, and differently-abled employees demonstrate strong effectiveness in fulfilling this service dimension. The consistency of positive feedback further reinforces that differently-abled employees are proficient in meeting service expectations promptly, thereby significantly contributing to overall customer satisfaction.

**Table 4**

*Customer satisfaction in terms of assurance*

Groups	Count	Sum	Mean	Variance	Rank
1. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee is knowledgeable enough about the menu and other restaurant services.	385	1421	3.6909	0.2692	1
2. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee exhibits confidence at work.	385	1394	3.6208	0.2737	3
3. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee behaves professionally.	385	1379	3.5818	0.2407	5
4. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee seemed trained and competent on what he/she is doing.	385	1390	3.6104	0.2563	4
5. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee provides clear information about product/service offerings.	385	1415	3.6753	0.2607	2

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F critical
Between Groups	3.2281	4	0.8070	3.1981	0.0125	2.3766
Within Groups	484.4987	1920	0.2523			
Total	487.7268	1924				

Table 4 presents the single-factor ANOVA on customer satisfaction related to assurance. Based on the data, the highest mean score among the five items was 3.6909,

indicating that customers were most satisfied with the perception that differently-abled employees were knowledgeable about the menu and other restaurant services. Conversely, the lowest mean score was 3.5818, suggesting that some customers were less satisfied with the professional behavior of differently-abled employees. The computed p-value was 0.0125, which is lower than the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This indicates a statistically significant difference between the mean scores, meaning that customer perceptions varied across the different aspects of assurance measured in the questionnaire. In other words, customers did not rate all elements of assurance equally, reflecting differing opinions regarding the various components assessed.

Based on the results gathered, customers had varying views on different questions measuring accessibility. Despite differently-abled employees being knowledgeable and well-trained (Putta, 2023), the lower satisfaction scores may have been attributed to the employees' behavior, which was influenced by their emotional and aesthetic attitudes as well as their external appearance and actions (Alhelalat et al., 2018). Understanding these nuances can help improve training programs and enhance overall customer satisfaction by addressing specific areas where customers perceive gaps. This suggests that while customers generally appreciate the employees' knowledge, there are concerns about their professionalism. Addressing these areas may help enhance the overall customer experience by ensuring consistent professionalism alongside strong product knowledge.

**Table 5**

*Customer satisfaction in terms of tangibility*

Groups	Count	Sum	Mean	Variance	Rank
1. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee is appropriately dressed as employee of the restaurant.	385	1372	3.5636	0.3403	5
2. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee serves customers with well- maintained eating utensils and condiments.	385	1402	3.6416	0.2618	2
3. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee communicates audibly for easy contact or conversation.	385	1380	3.5844	0.2748	4
4. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee use equipment of the restaurant with care.	385	1412	3.6675	0.2329	1
5. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee clean up floors and tables with ease.	385	1399	3.6338	0.2588	3

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F critical
Between Groups	2.8260	4	0.7065	2.5811	0.0356	2.3766
Within Groups	525.5377	1920	0.2723			
Total	528.3636	1924				

Table 5 presents the single-factor ANOVA on customer satisfaction for tangibility. Based on the data, the highest mean score among the five questions was 3.6675, indicating that customers were satisfied with how differently-abled employees handled the restaurant equipment with care. In contrast, the lowest mean scores were 3.5636 and 3.5844, reflecting customer dissatisfaction with how differently-abled employees were appropriately dressed and how they communicated audibly for easy contact or conversation. The computed p-value was 0.0356, which is lower than the significance level (alpha) of 0.05. This indicates a significant difference between the means, suggesting that the responses were not equal. In other words, customers had differing perceptions or opinions regarding the various aspects assessed by the questions.

Based on the results, customers expressed varied opinions on the different aspects of tangibility. While they were satisfied with the appearance and cleanliness of the equipment, the lower satisfaction scores related to the appropriateness of employee attire and the clarity of communication may be attributed to younger customers' higher expectations and desire for more personalized service experiences.

The findings highlight that although customers appreciate the careful handling of equipment by differently-abled employees, concerns remain regarding their attire and communication clarity. Addressing these issues can help enhance overall customer satisfaction by ensuring that employees are not only proficient in using equipment but also presentable and easy to communicate with, thereby meeting the evolving expectations of today's customers.

**Table 6**

*Customer satisfaction in terms of empathy*

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee makes me feel special.	385	1400	3.6458	0.2397	2
2. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee anticipates my needs and wants.	385	1405	3.6493	0.2439	1
3. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee assists me enthusiastically.	385	1400	3.6389	0.2476	3
4. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee doesn't ignore me.	385	1401	3.6363	0.2521	4
5. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee lighten up the ambiance of the place.	385	1388	3.6051	0.3020	5

<b>Source of Variation</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>F critical</b>
Between Groups	0.4730	4	0.1182	0.4600	0.7651	2.3766
Within Groups	493.3917	1920	0.2571			
Total	493.8648	1924				

Table 6 shows the single-factor ANOVA on customer satisfaction for empathy. Based on the data presented, the highest mean score among the five questions was 3.6493, indicating that customers were most satisfied with how differently-abled employees anticipated their needs and wants. The lowest mean score was 3.6051, reflecting satisfaction with how differently-abled employees lightened up the ambiance of the place. The computed p-value was 0.7651, which is higher than the significance level (alpha) of 0.05. This indicates no significant difference between the means, suggesting that all factors were considered equally important.

The results indicate that customers consistently had a positive view across various questions measuring empathy. Differently-abled employees exhibited a strong capacity to understand customers' perspectives and emotions during interactions, resulting in positive customer feelings. This ability to perceive and meet customer expectations enhanced interactive behaviors, which customers appreciated and which boosted their satisfaction (Bahadur et al., 2018). These findings suggest that customers consistently held positive views across various aspects of empathy. Differently-abled employees demonstrated a strong ability to understand customers' perspectives and emotions during interactions, resulting in consistently positive customer experiences.

**Table 7**

*Customer satisfaction in terms of reliability*

Groups	Count	Sum	Mean	Variance	Rank
1. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee serves me on the time as promised.	385	1329	3.4519	0.3403	5
2. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee is quick to react of my request.	385	1347	3.4987	0.2618	4
3. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee warmly greet, meet, welcome, talk and serve.	385	1379	3.5818	.2748	3
4. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee prioritized customer delight that create a sense of positive experience of the place.	385	1404	3.6468	0.2329	1
5. I am satisfied with how differently-abled employee skills are highlighted by the management.	385	1402	3.6416	0.2588	2

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F critical
Between Groups	11.5501	4	2.2275	9.3685	0.0000	2.3766
Within Groups	591.7766	1920	0.3082			
Total	603.3268	1924				

Table 7 presents the single-factor ANOVA on customer satisfaction for reliability. Based on the data, the highest mean score among the five questions was 3.6468, indicating that customers were satisfied with how differently-abled employees prioritized customer delight, creating a sense of positive experience in the establishment. The lowest mean scores were 3.4519 and 3.4987, indicating dissatisfaction among some customers regarding how differently-abled employees served customers on time as promised and how quickly they responded to customer requests. The computed p-value was 0.000, which is lower than the significance level (alpha) of 0.05. This indicates a significant difference between the means, suggesting that the responses were not equal. In other words, customers differed in their perceptions or opinions regarding the various aspects assessed by the questions.

Based on the results, customers expressed varying opinions on the questions measuring reliability. Sabir et al. (2018) suggested that the lower satisfaction scores regarding the ability of differently-abled employees to deliver promised services accurately and dependably may have stemmed from customers' high expectations for these employees to understand and promptly address their needs. The more reliable the employees were, the higher the customers' satisfaction with the service. The more reliably employees can meet these expectations, the greater the customers' satisfaction with the service. Understanding and addressing these varying perceptions can help improve reliability and enhance overall customer satisfaction.

This study also employed focused interviews to assess the experiences of differently-abled employees as they interacted with customers. The interviews revealed two primary themes: the challenges they faced during customer interactions and their achievements or successes in the food service sector.

### ***Theme 1: Difficulties in the Workplace***

***Communication.*** Differently-abled employees did not encounter difficulties in communicating when handling customer complaints; they knew how to manage customers effectively, both independently and, most importantly, with the support of their management.

*“In handling customer complaints, we follow a structured process known as “last”: listen, apologize, solve the problem, and thank the customer. If customers become too challenging to communicate with, we escalate the issue to a more senior role or management position.”* Employee 1

*“I often experience customer complaints, particularly during peak hours when there are delays in delivering orders and when customers are dissatisfied with the*

*food we serve. When customers become too challenging to communicate with, I escalate their concerns to a more senior role.” Employee 2*

*“There are times when I feel uncomfortable or shy interacting with customers, especially when handling complaints. However, if customers become too challenging to communicate with, I escalate the issue to a more senior role or management position.” Employee 5*

This finding aligns with the conclusions of Laguna et al. (2022), who noted that people with disabilities often persist in addressing problems until they are resolved. The study emphasized that differently-abled employees do not give up at the first sign of difficulty, as persistence is crucial to their success. Additionally, differently-abled employees excel in understanding and communicating with customers and are well-trained. This supports the present study’s observation that differently-abled employees are effective in handling customer complaints due to their perseverance and the comprehensive training they receive.

*“Most of the complaints I receive are manageable and handled effectively. Listening sincerely and responding promptly are crucial. I always apologize and demonstrate my willingness to take action to ensure that these problems do not occur again.” Employee 3*

Many participants emphasized the importance of using a standardized approach to manage complaints effectively. Differently-abled employees knew how to handle customers well independently and, most importantly, with the support of their management. However, instances of personal discomfort were noted, indicating that while structured processes and escalation procedures were in place, there may still be a need for additional support or training to address personal discomfort experienced by some employees.

Each differently-abled employee faces unique challenges in communication, particularly when handling operational services. Half of the respondents gave a common response, having extensive experience in the food service industry. Greater experience contributes to further skill development.

*“I didn’t encounter difficulties in communicating when it comes to handling operation service because I already have experience as a server in various food service industries.” Employee 1, 3, and 4*

*“It depends on the people I have encountered, especially when the customer or guest is from outside our country.” Employee 2*

*“It depends on the people I have encountered, as people have different behaviors and attitudes.”* Employee 5

Laguna et al. (2022) supported these findings, indicating that challenges related to cultural diversity and individual behaviors could lead to negative perceptions of communication. The study suggested that differently-abled employees may have encountered difficulties due to insufficient training and limited work experience, highlighting the importance of targeted skill development to deliver optimal service. Thus, while prior experience enhanced confidence and competence, it remained essential to address the complexities of customer diversity and behavior to improve communication and service quality among differently-abled employees.

Greater experience led to improved skill development. Experience played a crucial role in reducing communication difficulties. However, the diversity of customers and their behaviors continued to present significant challenges, requiring ongoing attention and further skill enhancement.

**Accessibility.** Differently-abled employees were comfortable with their mobility during customer interactions. Based on the results of the study, differently-abled individuals were confident in providing efficient and prompt service, likely because people with impairments possess various skills and abilities to perform well in restaurants and customer-related services. However, employees with disabilities faced several difficulties. They encountered daily discrimination due to their disabilities. Some were mistreated and bullied by their coworkers and customers in various ways (Narayanan, 2018).

*“In terms of mobility, yes, I am comfortable because, despite my disability, customers are the ones who boost my confidence the most.”* Employee 1

*“I am comfortable, just like people without disabilities. I can also provide efficient and prompt service. Sometimes, customers compliment me for being energetic at work and providing good and quick service.”* Employee 2

*“I am comfortable whenever I am prepared and ready.”* Employee 3 and 4

*“I am comfortable as long as I can provide efficient service. I do so with sincerity, even though I have experienced discrimination from customers who are drunk.”*  
Employee 5

Self-confidence and confidence at work were very important aspects that differently-abled employees needed to have. The majority of respondents felt comfortable with their

mobility and service provision; customer interactions and preparedness significantly influenced this comfort. Although experiences of discrimination were not prevalent, they presented challenges that affected some employees' comfort in providing service. Most differently-abled employees did not feel uncomfortable providing efficient and prompt service in terms of mobility. Difficulties encountered with mobility depended on the individual's specific situation or disability.

*"I practice acting normally, especially when it comes to customer interaction. If I lose my confidence, I can't perform my work effectively or interact well with customers. With a lot of experience in different workplaces, I feel more confident. I have realized that I can keep up with others, and sometimes, not to boast, I even surpass them."* Employee 1

These findings align with the insights provided by supervisors in the study conducted by Donie and Bella (2018). The supervisors observed that individuals with disabilities (PWD) they worked with were adaptable and capable of working alongside regular personnel. Furthermore, it was noted that some PWD employees even surpassed their colleagues in performance. These observations underscore the importance of offering sufficient training and recognizing each employee's strengths to effectively utilize their abilities. Therefore, given the challenges faced by differently-abled employees, such as mobility issues affecting service delivery, the findings suggest the necessity for customized training programs and job assignments to maximize their contributions in the workplace.

*"Sometimes, my feet hurt from standing for long hours. I can't move quickly while working because I can't walk properly."* Employee 3

**Customer Behavior.** Unconscious bias is not a prevalent issue for differently-abled people working in the food service industry. However, unconscious bias can vary depending on the visibility of the disability, especially among those who are unfamiliar with such differences.

*"In all my years of service, I haven't experienced any unconscious bias."*  
Employee 1, 3, 4 and 5

These observations are consistent with the insights provided by Laguna et al. (2022), where clients interacted with staff with disabilities without exhibiting stereotyping. However,

one manager noted that some customers might not realize an employee had a disability, leading to assumptions about their work speed compared to typical employees. This highlights how unconscious biases can surface in customer interactions, even if they are not overtly expressed. Therefore, while unconscious bias may not be pervasive, it still requires attention to ensure fair treatment and understanding of differently-abled employees in the workplace.

*“I often encounter unconscious bias in children, especially since they are seeing me for the first time. However, I simply ignore what I hear because these things are not new to me.” Employee 2*

Unconscious bias still requires attention to ensure the fair treatment and understanding of differently-abled employees. Most differently-abled employees experienced similar difficulties when dealing with frustrated and impatient customers.

*“In fast food, it is unavoidable to encounter demanding and impatient customers. We cannot control the behavior of customers, for example, when they are drunk. I have not faced any difficulties because we were trained on how to cope with such situations. You just need to be resilient.” Employee 1*

*“When there is a misunderstanding, the customer becomes angry and doesn’t listen; they only curse at me.” Employee 3*

*“Communication, since I am the owner, cook, and also the server.” Employee 4*

*“Communication, especially when dealing with senior customers.” Employee 5*

These findings align with the insights from Sá et al. (2018), which suggest that differently-abled employees often face negative judgments regarding their visible disabilities and their ability to interact with customers in frontline service roles. This connection underscores the importance of providing adequate training and fostering resilience to help differently-abled employees manage and overcome these biases and communication challenges. By equipping employees with the necessary skills and building their resilience, employers can better support differently-abled staff in handling and mitigating the challenges posed by frustrated and impatient customers.

Communication remains a central difficulty when dealing with frustrated and impatient customers. Proper training, resilience, and understanding of customer behavior play crucial roles in managing these interactions effectively. Training and resilience were cited as effective tools for managing difficult customers and were highlighted as important personal qualities in

coping with such challenges. The respondents' training helped mitigate the impact of these behaviors, emphasizing the importance of resilience.

**Customer Service.** Most differently-abled employees encounter difficulties in handling multiple customers simultaneously due to time constraints. Based on the findings, the challenges and effective strategies reported by differently-abled employees in managing multiple customers play a crucial role in creating an inclusive work environment. When these employees demonstrate adaptability and effective teamwork in handling customer interactions, it not only improves their service performance but also positively impacts customer perceptions.

*"I didn't experience difficulties in handling multiple customers. The thing that I can be proud of despite my disability is that others get more tired than I do. Strength always lies in the mind; don't think that just because you have an impairment, you can't do anything."* Employee 1

*"Since each employee has their own tasks, such as food running, food preparation, bussing out, etc. Before, I was having a hard time, but I learned that if you really want to, you can do it."* Employee 2

*"I focus on one area, pending numerous orders, many customers follow up on their orders; some are understanding customers, and some are not. I lost control of the situation."* Employee 3

*"I have encountered difficulties in handling multiple customers, especially since some customers are impatient and frequently follow up on their orders."* Employee 4

This was consistent with Kim and So (2023), which suggested that increased customer contact with differently-abled employees could enhance attitudes and acceptance, contributing to a more inclusive workplace culture. Additionally, the ability to manage customer interactions efficiently and positively could empower differently-abled employees, boosting their confidence and promoting their independence. Some participants reported effective strategies and positive experiences in handling multiple customers, while others highlighted challenges stemming from customer behavior and personal discomfort. These insights emphasize the importance of mindset, teamwork, and adaptability in managing multiple customer interactions efficiently. Most differently-abled employees did not encounter challenges in customer service when handling heavy workloads. However, challenges depend on the nature of the employee's disability.

*“When it comes to overtime duties, it causes me little bit of stress.”* Employee 2

*“I can’t eat on time and even forget to drink water when standing for long periods while dealing with heavy duties.”* Employee 3

*“Since I am older, they leave the heavy tasks to others.”* Employee 5

These findings align with Laguna et al. (2022), which indicated that individuals with disabilities could perform tasks as effectively as those without disabilities and often exhibited greater empathy toward customers. The ability of differently-abled employees to manage demanding tasks despite their disabilities underscores the importance of inclusive practices and support for employee well-being in customer service roles, taking into account factors such as age and workload distribution. Additionally, according to Camungay et al. (2021), staff became restless and stressed when dealing with heavy duties. This restlessness may cause them to feel nervous, as customer expectations are continuously changing.

The majority reported not experiencing significant challenges, while others highlighted issues related to stress from overtime and physical strain. Age and task allocation also played a role in mitigating these challenges for some individuals, suggesting the importance of considering employee well-being and workload distribution in customer service roles.

***Time Management.*** All of the differently-abled employees had experienced additional stress in meeting response time targets.

*“It can’t be avoided. For example, if there is a 30-minute time interval before the response target time, the customer becomes angry because they want their order delivered immediately.”* Employee 1

*“Yes, during peak hours, there are times when I fail to meet the customer’s order delivery time.”* Employee 4

According to Camungay et al. (2021), behaviors and a mindset allow them to adapt to changes in their work environment, preventing negative effects on their psychological well-being and helping them cope with distress. Psychological distress is common in a restaurant work environment, and differently-abled employees must learn to manage it so it does not affect their performance or well-being. However, some employees felt hopeless about meeting management’s expectations because they believed they were not good enough for the tasks they were required to perform. The responses revealed that while peak hours significantly contributed to stress and emotional challenges, the pressure to meet targets was a consistent

issue employees faced. The inevitability of stress and occasional failure to meet targets highlighted the demanding nature of customer service roles in maintaining timely interactions.

*“In terms of timely delivery of orders, I didn’t encounter difficulties in my situation. If you show weakness and can’t handle it, their attitude towards you will change. However, I do make adjustments in my work if things do not fit with my condition.”* Employee 1

The capability of differently-abled employees to effectively manage tasks like timely order delivery, despite potential challenges, reflects their adaptability and the positive outcomes of workplace accommodations. Additionally, proactive strategies and self-presentation contribute to their success in managing work effectively. These insights suggest that while the task was generally manageable, proactive strategies and self-presentation play important roles in ensuring success.

### ***Theme 2: Success in the Food Service Industry***

Differently-abled employees had their own definitions of success in the food service industry. The idea that hard work and purposeful effort lead to success was reflected in the varied definitions provided by the participants, who identified multiple paths and metrics for achieving success in their roles.

*“Achievements such as awards for excellent service also serve as an inspiration to others.”* Employee 1

*“The length of service as a measure of success.”* Employee 2 and 4

*“When customers are happy and satisfied, it is a success for me. Additionally, learning something new is also a measure of success.”* Employee 3

*“Customer Commendation and House Investment.”* Employee 5

Laguna et al. (2022) supported these findings by highlighting positive customer feedback toward differently-abled employees. Customers praised their efforts and performance, demonstrating that despite disabilities, they could perform on par with their non-disabled peers. This feedback reflects their hard work and dedication, reinforcing the concept of success in the food service industry. Success was defined by a range of factors, including formal achievements, service duration, customer satisfaction, personal growth, and financial gains. These diverse perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of success in this industry.

Differently-abled employees also viewed repeat or regular customers as a key sign of success. Hamel (2024) emphasized that excellent customer service encourages return visits, especially when customers feel valued. Respondents confirmed that their consistent positive interactions and exceptional service contributed significantly to customer loyalty and repeat business, important indicators of success.

*“Regular or repeat customers became happier when we already knew their likes and dislikes. It was easier for us to provide excellent service that aligned with their needs, and customers appreciated it more. Some regular customers preferred me to serve them over other employees.”* Employee 1

*“Customers come back because of me and the good service I provide.”* Employee 2

*“When I am on my rest day, some regular customers look for me because of the good service I provide.”* Employee 5

Differently-abled employees expressed a strong willingness to continue serving customers despite their disabilities. These findings align with Laguna et al. (2022), who suggested that employing persons with disabilities showcases a company’s diverse workforce, enhancing its appeal to customers and potential employees. Furthermore, the dedication of differently-abled employees can inspire other businesses, encouraging neighboring enterprises to adopt inclusive practices that improve reputations and enrich the broader business environment.

*“My condition is not a hindrance for me to continue serving people, and I want to explore more opportunities, such as working as a waiter on a cruise ship.”*  
Employee 2

*“As long as I can provide service, because it’s a commitment and a labor of love.”*  
Employee 3

The findings highlight a shared sense of strong commitment to their roles. This common thread demonstrates the dedication these individuals have to the food service industry, regardless of their physical challenges. The responses reveal a strong commitment to the food service industry among differently-abled employees. Their motivations include a belief in their abilities, a passion for their work, and aspirations for growth and new opportunities. These insights illustrate the nature of their dedication and the various factors that contribute to their willingness to continue serving customers.

## 5. Conclusion

Customers generally perceive the service provided by differently-abled employees in the food service industry positively, particularly regarding responsiveness and empathy. Despite initial concerns, these employees effectively met or exceeded customer expectations. High customer satisfaction levels were noted in responsiveness and empathy, though there were variations in perceptions of assurance, tangibility, and reliability. The minimal difficulties faced by differently-abled employees in customer interactions suggest that their disabilities did not significantly impede service quality. This challenges misconceptions about their capabilities and supports inclusive hiring practices. Overall, the findings validate that differently-abled employees can effectively contribute to customer satisfaction, emphasizing the need for ongoing training and support to further enhance their service delivery.

Looking at the bigger picture, this research highlights customer satisfaction with services provided by differently-abled employees, as well as the challenges these employees face during service interactions in the food service industry in the 1st and 2nd districts of Quezon Province, Philippines. It recommends pursuing training and development programs to enhance skills, including communication, customer service, and time management, to reduce personal discomfort and improve service quality. Policies should be developed and implemented to promote support for differently-abled employees, alongside customer awareness programs to educate the public about their value and abilities. Additionally, an employee awareness program should be implemented to remind all staff that, regardless of capacity or condition, differently-abled employees should treat all customers equally. A dress code policy and turnaround time guidelines should also be established. Regular feedback mechanisms are essential to gather input from differently-abled employees about their experiences and challenges.

Further research is recommended to explore the specific challenges and successes of differently-abled employees across various sectors of the food service industry to build a more comprehensive understanding. The researchers also suggest expanding the scope of future studies to include a larger and more diverse sample of differently-abled individuals with various disabilities. Providing segmentation based on different disabilities will help identify specific strengths and weaknesses, better measure customer satisfaction, and tailor training programs to meet the needs of different types of disabilities.

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