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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF OUTSOURCED CATERING SERVICES AT A RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Inadequate government subsidies in South Africa have led to financial challenges for many institutions of higher education. Some universities have sought strategies to operate and survive within the limited resources available. Outsourcing campus-catering services is one of the strategies employed by universities to save costs. The study, based on quantitative research study used a structured data collection process informed by a positivist research paradigm, investigate students' perceptions of the outsourced catering services in an institution of higher learning in a peri-urban area in the Eastern Cape Province. Participation in the study was voluntary and involved a sample of 270 campus residence students. Results indicate that services offered by the outsourced catering services did not meet the needs of students and thus students' expectations. Students were particularly not satisfied with food pricing and quality. The students' dissatisfaction with campus catering services may negatively affect students' experience of the campus. Food is important for students' physical and cognitive developmental needs and thus vital to students' academic performance and progress. The study highlights an urgent need for the evaluation of the outsourced catering services. The institutions of higher education need to put measures in place to redress the situation and ensure that students' best interests are served.

Keywords: Outsourcing, students' experiences, campus catering services, campus cafeteria, effective learning and development, campus space.