

Food Safety Practices, Inventory Management Efficiency and Operational Performance among School Canteen Vendors

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ABSTRACT

Food safety and inventory management are essential elements in school canteens as they affect the quality of services, utilization of resources, and compliance with health standards. However, the association between these factors and canteen vendors' performance has received limited attention in literature. This study aimed to determine the degree of association between food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance of school canteen vendors in one of the cities in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2026-2027. Specifically, this study sought to assess the level of food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and performance of school canteen vendors and examine the relationships between these constructs. A descriptive-correlational research design was adopted for this study. One hundred school canteen vendors were selected from the universe of 132 vendors using a stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire that was subjected to content validation and reliability analysis, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.954. Data was analyzed using percentages and means for the descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that respondents had very high levels of food safety practices ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.15$), inventory management efficiency ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.13$), and performance ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.12$). Food safety practices were found to be significantly associated with performance ($r = -0.247$, $p = 0.013$), but not with inventory management efficiency ($r = 0.035$, $p = 0.729$). Inventory management efficiency was significantly related to food safety practices ($r = 0.421$, $SD = 0.150$). Based on the study's findings, it was recommended that food safety practices should be reinforced regularly to ensure the quality of school canteen services.

Keywords: food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, operational performance, school canteen vendors, public schools.

INTRODUCTION

In the concept of the global community, researched by Singh and Pumiya (2024) suggests that food safety is a crucial public health concern globally, since the eating of unsanitary food causes millions of illnesses every year. Additionally, school canteens play a significant role in the school environment, specifically, the students' nutritional diets and eating behaviors. They contribute greatly to the promotion of healthier and sustainable nutritional eating patterns (Bomboma et. al., 2026). Moreover, Hassan et.al (2026) unveil that foodborne infections are a serious global health concern, frequently because of poor food safety practices. The school dining staff's knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAPs) and the gaps between self-reported and real food safety practices. In addition, the results of Balondo and Lombrio (2025) indicate on the high operational efficiency, specifically, in resource management and process optimization, but highlight areas of improvement in service speed, pricing strategies, and technology integration. Customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by product quality, policies and staff attitudes, with service speed and pricing as areas of concern. Thus, Egeler and Baur (2022) found that 67.4% of Norwegian adolescents use the school canteen just occasionally or never. The same study revealed that those students who ate at the school canteen at least twice a week were more likely to purchase food or drinks from a nearby store during school breaks, before or after school.

In the Philippine government settings, Article 2 of Republic Act No. 6938, “also known as the Cooperative Code of the Philippines, outlines the State’s Declaration of Policy regarding the promotion, self-reliance, and development of cooperative movements.” Similarly, in the Department of Education in the Philippines, created a DepEd Order 08, s. 2007 a revised guideline of revised implementing guidelines on the operation and management of school canteens in public elementary and secondary schools issued in order to rationalize the operation and management of school canteens in the public school system. Despite the importance of the key elements, such as policies, implementations and practices, there is limited research assessing the schools’ canteens in terms of food safety practices and inventory management efficiency in relation to operational performance, especially among canteen vendors in public schools. Addressing this gap will provide valuable insights into the extent of implementation and practices in the government and educational context.

This study aimed to determine the level of relationship between food safety practices, inventory management efficiency and operational performance of public-school canteen vendors in one of the cities in Negros Occidental during the Academic Year 2026-2027. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the demographic profile the canteen vendors in terms of Staffing, Food Services, Years of Experience as Canteen Vendor, Type of Canteen Operation and Financial Stability?
- What is the school canteen vendors extent of implementation of food safety practices when grouped according in terms of Personal Hygiene, Food Handling, Proper Storage and Waste Management?
- What is the level of inventory practices of the school canteen vendors when grouped according to Stock Monitoring, FIFO (First-in, First Out) and Prevention of Spoilage/Repurposed?
- What is the level of operational performance of school canteen vendors in terms of Service Quality, Productivity, Cost Control, Customer Satisfaction and Compliance with Health and Safety Standards?
- Is there significant relationship between food safety practices and operational performance among school canteen vendors?
- Is there significant relationship between level of inventory management efficiency and operational performance among school canteen vendors?
- What is the relationship between food safety practices and inventory management efficiency?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on contingency theory, otherwise referred to as the contingency approach to management. This theory unifies various perspectives and has multiple implications. While the contingency theory questions the applicability of management theories which were all-inclusive, the theory has a close link to Lewin’s open system concept. The main idea of contingency theory is that management practices are dependent on the situation. Previous studies on contingency theory reveal that leadership style, job design, worker participation, and organization structure are key factors which contribute to total productive management (Shonk, 2026).

Based on the tentative ideas of contingency theory, this study assumes that there is no best management practice for achieving positive outcomes. Thus, it remains true that the success of food safety practices and inventory management efficiency is determined by how well they are applied to public school canteen vendors’ contexts. Therefore, the application of contingency theory gives this study a solid theoretical basis in understanding the association between food safety practices and inventory management efficiency in school canteens. The theory will be used to assume that effective management practices which are situational result in positive operational performance of school canteen.

Furthermore, management theories are a set of concepts which define how an organization, business or team is managed. Business leaders are those responsible for designing management strategies which help their team achieve organizational goals. They often design strategies on motivation and resource allocation to ensure they achieve business goals (Smith, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This research study employed a structured and quantitative approach to investigate the interrelationships between food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance among school canteen vendors based in one of the cities of Negros Occidental. This study also aimed to assess the level of food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance and identify the significant relationships among the three variables.

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. A descriptive type of research was adopted to describe the level of food safety practices, inventory management, and performance of the school canteen vendors. On the other hand, a correlational type of research was conducted to establish associations between the variables. The descriptive-correlational research design was considered appropriate for this study because it allowed the researchers to describe and identify relationships between the variables without a need to manipulate the research variables.

Quantitative Component

The respondents of the study were the school canteen vendors of the selected public schools from one of the cities in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2026–2027. Out of the 132 respondents, a sample size of 100 respondents was selected from the target population using Yamane's Formula. The respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to represent the participating school canteens adequately.

The researchers utilized a researcher-made questionnaire as an instrument for data gathering. The instrument was validated by five (5) experts, resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.99. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents from the target population through pilot testing to determine its reliability. The reliability coefficients of the study instruments using Cronbach's Alpha were 0.887 for Food Safety Practices, 0.900 for Inventory Management Efficiency, 0.855 for Operational Performance, and 0.954 for overall reliability.

The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data analysis started with the computation of the frequency and percentage distribution to determine the respondents' demographic profile. Furthermore, the researchers used weighted mean and standard deviation to evaluate the level of food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance of the school canteen vendors. A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was done to determine the variables' significant relationships, and all study hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted according to ethical standards and principles. The respondents were volunteers, and their consent was obtained before conducting the research. The respondents were informed about the goals of the study, its nature, and importance. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided and that it would only be used for research purposes. In addition, they were guaranteed anonymity and privacy. All the personal information of the respondents was kept confidential and was only used for the research. The respondents also had a right not to participate in the study or withdraw from it. At all stages of the study, honesty, integrity, respect, and objectivity were practiced.

LIMITATIONS

The study covered only the public-school canteen vendors in one city of Negros Occidental for the School Year 2026–2027. Since it is descriptive-correlational research, the study only found relationships between variables and did not try to determine their causes. This study also relied on the respondents' self-reported data, which can contain biases. The study only focused on the food safety practices, inventory management, and

operational performance of the participants and did not consider other variables. Therefore, the conclusions only applied to the study's population and sample.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study on food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance of school canteen vendors in one of the cities in Negros Occidental. The findings were presented according to the objectives of the study, which include the descriptive analysis and inferential analysis of the study. Descriptive analysis consisted of the presentation of respondents' food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance. On the other hand, inferential analysis was performed to establish relationships between the variables. With these objectives, this section presents the research findings related to the study's operational practices and their effect on the efficient management of school canteens.

Quantitative Findings

This section presents the quantitative results of the survey conducted to school canteen vendors. The discussion below focuses on the descriptive statistics of the demographical data of the respondents, as well as the mean scores attained in food safety practice, inventory management, and operational performance assessments. These findings indicate the status of the respondents' food safety and inventory management practices, as well as their level of operational performance.

The section further discusses the statistical relationships between the study variables using inferential statistics. Specifically, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationships between food safety practices and inventory management, operational performance and inventory management, as well as food safety practices and operational performance. The results described in this section ultimately lead to the acceptance or rejection of the study's null hypotheses. Together, the quantitative results provide an extensive understanding of the study's problem and contribute to the general understanding of school canteen management and operations.

Table 1. Profile of Canteen Vendors

Profile	Category	f	%
Staffing			
	1-2	46	46.00
	3-4	35	35.00
	5 and more	19	19.00
	Total	100	100.00
Food Services Offered			
	Snacks only	28	28.00
	Meals and snacks	52	52.00
	Beverages only	8	8.00
	Others	12	12.00
	Total	100	100.00
Years of Experience			
	Below 1 year	14	14.00
	1-3 years	41	41.00
	4-6 years	27	27.00
	7 years and above	18	18.00
	Total	100	100.00
Type of Canteen Operation			
	School Manage	22	22.00
	Private Manage	58	58.00
	Cooperative	20	20.00

	Total	100	100.00
Financial Stability			
	Low	21	21.00
	Mdoerate	56	56.00
	High	23	23.00
	Total	100	100.00

Most school canteen vendors had a small staff, with 46.00% having 1–2 workers. Additionally, most of the respondents sold snacks and meals (52.00%), had 1–3 years of experience as canteen vendors (41.00%), were privately owned (58.00%), and had a moderate financial status (56.00%). Overall, the results can be generalized that the respondents were moderately experienced, privately owned, and moderately financially stable.

Table 2. School Canteen Vendors extent of implementation of Food Safety Practices

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Personal Hygiene	4.55	0.24	Very High
Food Handling	4.53	0.23	Very High
Proper Storage	4.50	0.25	Very High
Waste Management	4.55	0.26	Very High
FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES (As a Whole)	4.53	0.15	Very High

Overall ratings of food safety practices of school canteen vendors were found to be Very High ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.15$). Personal Hygiene and Waste Management received the highest mean scores ($M = 4.55$), followed by Food Handling ($M = 4.53$), and Proper Storage ($M = 4.50$). Maintaining cleanliness in the canteen area was given the highest rating among indicators ($M = 4.69$), while use of protective gears (hairnets, gloves, or aprons) got the lowest score ($M = 4.37$), however, all indicators were still interpreted as Very High. This implies that canteen vendors are practicing proper food safety measures, which ensure a healthy and safe eating environment.

Table 3. Level of Inventory Practices of the School Canteen Vendors

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Stock Monitoring	4.43	0.21	Very High
FIFO (First-In, First-Out)	4.49	0.22	Very High
Prevention of Spoilage / Repurposing	4.56	0.24	Very High
INVENTORY MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY (As a Whole)	4.50	0.13	Very High

The effectiveness of inventory management practices of school canteen vendors was generally rated Very High ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.13$). Prevention of Spoilage/Repurposing received the highest mean score ($M = 4.56$), followed by FIFO ($M = 4.49$), and Stock Monitoring ($M = 4.43$). As for the indicators, using older stock before newer stock was given the highest rating ($M = 4.67$), while monitoring fast-moving and slow-moving items to avoid stock-out and overstock was rated the lowest ($M = 4.31$), yet all indicators were interpreted as Very High. Overall, the results suggest that canteen vendors manage their inventory very well through stock monitoring, proper stock rotation, and prevention of spoilage, which will result in good quality food, less waste, and efficient operations of the canteen.

Table 4. Level of Operational Performance of School Canteen Vendors

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Service Quality	4.58	0.30	Very High
Productivity	4.46	0.29	Very High
Cost Control	4.39	0.29	Very High
Customer Satisfaction	4.54	0.28	Very High

Compliance with Health and Safety Standards	4.71	0.26	Very High
OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE (As a Whole)	4.54	0.12	Very High

Operational performance of school canteen vendors was assessed Very High on average ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.12$). Compliance with Health and Safety Standards attained the highest mean score ($M = 4.71$), followed by Service Quality ($M = 4.58$), Customer Satisfaction ($M = 4.54$), Productivity ($M = 4.46$), and Cost Control ($M = 4.39$). Out of the indicators, the consistent compliance with school and government health and safety requirements gained the highest score ($M = 4.73$), while effective expense management attained the lowest score ($M = 4.33$), albeit all the indicators were interpreted as Very High. The results suggest that school canteen vendors consistently demonstrate high operational performance as they comply, maintain quality service, attain customer satisfaction, ensure productivity, and control costs in their daily operations.

Table 5. Significant Relationship between Food Safety Practices and Operational Performance

Variable	Test Statistics (r_s)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
Food Safety Practices vs. Operational Performance	-0.247*	0.013	Reject H_0	Significant

There was a significant relationship between food safety practices and operational performance of the school canteen vendors ($r = -0.247$, $p = 0.013$), thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. This implies that food safety practices were significantly associated with the operational performance of the vendors. The results can be interpreted to mean that there is a need for improved personal hygiene practices, proper handling, storage, and disposal techniques among the school canteen vendors to improve their service and operational performance.

Table 6. Significant Relationship between Level of Inventory Management Efficiency and Operational Performance

Variable	Test Statistics (r_s)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
Inventory Management Efficiency vs. Operational Performance	0.035	0.729	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant

There was no significant relationship between inventory management efficiency and operational performance of school canteen vendors ($r = 0.035$, $p = 0.729$). As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. This means that the inventory management efficiency, including stock monitoring, FIFO, and prevention of food wastage or recycling, was not a significant predictor of the operational performance of the canteen vendors. It appears that other variables explain the operational performance of these vendors better than inventory management. This conclusion was made based on the service quality, productivity, cost control, customer satisfaction, and compliance with health and safety regulations that the sampled vendors provided.

Table 7. Relationship between Food Safety Practices, and Inventory Management Efficiency

Variable	Test Statistics (r_s)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
Food Safety Practices vs Inventory Management Efficiency	0.421*	0.000	Fail to Reject H_0	Significant

A significant relationship was found between food safety practices and inventory management efficiency among school canteen vendors ($r = 0.421$, $p = 0.000$), which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This result implies that proper food safety practices are significantly related to the inventory management efficiency of school canteen vendors. In other words, school canteen vendors are likely to have proper stock monitoring, first-in-first-out, and prevention of spoiled food practices if they have proper personal and food hygiene, appropriate food storage and preparation, and waste management techniques.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that school canteen vendors were very high on food safety practices,

inventory management efficiency, and operational performance. The very high level of food safety practices found in this study suggests that the respondents maintained proper personal hygiene, food handling techniques, storage, and waste disposal practices in their daily operations. This finding verifies the assertion of the World Health Organization (2024) that proper food safety practices play a crucial role in preventing foodborne illnesses and protecting consumers. Likewise, the result agrees with the findings of Ramos and Despojo (2025) and Ningsih et al. (2024), who found that food safety behaviors of school canteen vendors were positive predictors of food quality and safety. The respondents' very high level of commitment to food safety practices also suggests their strong belief in providing a safe and sanitary food service system.

This study also revealed a very high inventory management efficiency among school canteen vendors. The respondents were highly committed to monitoring stock items, adopting the FIFO system, and avoiding spoilage in their operations. This finding confirms the work of Heizer, Render, and Munson (2020), who found that inventory management promotes organizational efficiency through the proper control of stock items. Likewise, the conclusion of Dinesh Kumar and Santhosh (2024) supports the current finding, arguing that inventory management improves the utilization of organizational resources and minimizes operational costs. The finding indicates that the respondents understand the centrality of inventory management and hence take it seriously in their operations.

The operational performance of school canteen vendors was also very high, notably their ability to comply with health and safety regulations and the quality of service they provide. This outcome is consistent with the view of Slack and Brandon-Jones (2022) that operational performance reflects an organization's ability to achieve efficiency and effectiveness through its capacity to deliver quality service, increase productivity, and meet customer satisfaction. Similarly, the result of Lobron et al. (2023) corroborates this study, showing that effective canteen management practices predict service quality and customer satisfaction. The finding implies that school canteen vendors are generally able to provide satisfactory services to customers while abiding by the regulations in the food service industry.

However, this study found a significant positive relationship between food safety practices and operational performance of school canteen vendors, suggesting that the former significantly enhances the latter. According to Contingency Theory, this study's finding implies that the operational performance of school canteen vendors depends on their ability to adopt operating practices that are most suited to the work environment. As a food service provider, a school canteen vendor that exercises proper food safety measures is more likely to provide quality services to customers while meeting the regulatory requirements of the food service industry. This result builds upon previous studies that identified food safety practices as a critical success factor of a food-service venture.

In contrast, this study found that the inventory management efficiency of school canteen vendors does not significantly predict their operational performance. This outcome contradicts the findings of Heizer et al. (2020), Dinesh Kumar and Santhosh (2024), and Kwateng et al. (2022), who found that inventory management significantly enhances the operational performance of an organization. This study's finding suggests that the respondents are unable to use inventory management practices to improve their performance. The result could mean that the school canteen vendors understand the benefits of inventory management but do not fully understand its application. Although inventory management plays a critical role in operational performance, its significance is contingent upon the influence of other environmental factors, such as customer behavior and organizational policies.

Finally, this study found that the food safety practices of school canteen vendors significantly predict their inventory management efficiency. This result suggests that vendors exercise proper storage, implementation of the FIFO system, and avoidance of spoilage and wastage in their operation. The finding highlights the fact that proper food safety measures promote organizational efficiency through proper inventory management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey results, it is recommended that school authorities enhance monitoring and inspection of food safety practices in school canteens. Through these processes, it will be possible to ensure that the issue is addressed properly, and the implementation of improved practices is monitored. It is recommended that school canteen vendors maintain and improve their food safety practices. Considering that food safety practices had a significant relationship with operational performance, there is a likelihood that the enhancement of these practices will result in improved performance, increased customer satisfaction, and improved compliance. Even though inventory has no significant relationship with operational performance, it is recommended that vendors continue to focus on improving inventory management practices. These include the monitoring of stock levels and the use of the FIFO method to minimize waste. As a result, it will be possible to ensure that the canteen operates at maximum efficiency.

The Department of Education may consider boosting training and technical aid sessions to reinforce existing policies and regulations on school canteens. Through the process, it will be possible to boost food safety practices among the vendors and ensure that healthy meals are provided to learners. The researcher recommends that future studies focus on other aspects of operational performance such as leadership, financial management, organizational commitment, and customer needs. The data collected from the study will help future researchers address the issue from different angles and come up with long-term solutions.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine the relationship between food safety practices, inventory management efficiency, and operational performance of school canteen vendors in one of the cities in Negros Occidental. The results of the study revealed that the respondents have very high food safety practices and inventory management efficiency and high operational performance, which means that they strictly adhere to the established health and operational standards.

The results also showed that there is a significant relationship between food safety practices and the operational performance of the school canteen. On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between inventory management efficiency and operational performance, which means that the former does not predict the latter. However, it can be concluded from the result that food safety practices significantly predict inventory management efficiency and operational performance.

This study concluded that food safety practices have a more significant effect on the operational performance of public-school canteens than inventory management efficiency. It is recommended that food safety practices should be emphasized and maintained to ensure the health and safety of the consumers and the business's success. Meanwhile, inventory management should also be sustained to ensure that these practices are properly carried out.

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