

Operations management of school canteens in the public schools of Tabaco city division

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Abstract

This study investigated the operations management styles of public-school canteens in Tabaco City Division during School Year 2024–2025. Using a descriptive-survey design, data were gathered from 100 respondents composed of school heads and canteen in-charges across 50 schools. The research examined centralized, concessionaire, cooperative, and student-led/laboratory management styles, assessed their levels of implementation, and tested differences between elementary and secondary schools. Findings revealed that while centralized and cooperative styles were common across both levels, variations existed in implementation intensity, with secondary schools more likely to adopt student-led laboratory approaches. Problems encountered included limited facilities, budget constraints, compliance with nutrition policies, and documentation challenges. An operations management plan was proposed to address these issues, emphasizing capacity-building, stricter monitoring, and collaborative governance. The study contributes to policy refinement, administrative decision-making, and program improvement in support of safe, nutritious, and accountable school food services.

Keywords: School Canteen Management; Operations Styles; Tabaco City Division; Nutrition Policy

1. Introduction

School canteens play a vital role in promoting student health, nutrition, and academic performance. Globally, they are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as ending hunger, ensuring wellness, and promoting sustainable consumption. International frameworks like UNICEF and WHO's Global Standards for Health-Promoting Schools emphasize the duty of schools to provide safe, nutritious meals. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 11037 institutionalized feeding programs, while DepEd Orders No. 8 (2007) and No. 13 (2017) regulate canteen operations and food choices. These policies ensure that school canteens prioritize student welfare over profit.

In Tabaco City Division, where 27.4% of school-aged children are undernourished, canteens serve as critical safety nets. Management styles vary some are centralized under school heads, others cooperative-managed by teachers' groups, concessionaire-run by external providers, or student-led as laboratory spaces in secondary schools. These diverse arrangements highlight the importance of examining how management styles affect efficiency, compliance, and student outcomes.

This study seeks to determine the operations management styles of canteens in Tabaco City Division, assess their levels of implementation, compare elementary and secondary schools, identify operational challenges, and propose a responsive management plan. By doing so, it aims to strengthen accountability, improve nutrition delivery, and support educational development.

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2. Materials

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through a researcher-made structured questionnaire administered to school heads and canteen in-charges. Secondary data included published and unpublished theses, scholarly journals, official memoranda, books, and internet-based materials that provided theoretical and policy context.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: (1) identification of operations management styles, (2) assessment of the level of implementation using a five-point Likert scale, and (3) identification of problems encountered in canteen operations. The instrument was validated through content and face validation by thesis committee members, Public Schools District Supervisors, and Education Program Supervisors.

Respondents included 50 school heads (40 elementary, 10 secondary) and 50 canteen in-charges, distributed across 10 school clusters in Tabaco City Division. Their direct involvement in daily canteen operations ensured credible and relevant data.

Materials also included official DepEd policies, Republic Acts, and sanitation codes that guided the interpretation of findings. These references provided the legal and institutional framework against which the management styles were evaluated.

3. Methods

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-survey design to capture the prevailing operations management styles of school canteens. The structured questionnaire served as the main research instrument, validated through expert review and pilot testing.

Data collection involved distributing the questionnaire to 100 respondents across 50 schools. Respondents were briefed on the objectives, assured of confidentiality, and given two weeks to complete the survey. A 100% retrieval rate was achieved.

For data analysis, frequency counts and percentages were used to determine the distribution of management styles. Weighted means were computed to assess the level of implementation of each style, guided by a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Very Low” to “Very High.” To test the hypothesis on differences between elementary and secondary schools, the F-test was applied, comparing centralized and cooperative styles.

This systematic approach ensured that both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed, allowing the study to present not only the status of canteen operations but also meaningful comparisons across school levels.

4. Results

The study revealed that centralized and cooperative management styles were the most prevalent across both elementary and secondary schools. Elementary schools leaned more toward centralized arrangements, with school heads directly overseeing budgeting, procurement, and compliance. Cooperative styles were also common, particularly in schools where teachers’ associations managed operations.

Secondary schools displayed greater diversity, with some adopting student-led laboratory styles integrated into Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) classes. This arrangement provided practical learning opportunities while supporting canteen operations. Concessionaire styles were less frequent but present in selected elementary schools.

Weighted mean analysis showed that centralized management was implemented at a “High” level in elementary schools, while cooperative styles were moderately applied. In secondary schools, student-led laboratory styles scored “High,” reflecting their integration into curriculum-based activities.

The F-test indicated no significant difference between elementary and secondary schools in centralized and cooperative styles, supporting the null hypothesis.

Common problems identified included inadequate facilities, limited budgets, difficulty in enforcing DepEd’s healthy food policies, and challenges in documentation and financial accountability.

5. Discussion

The findings highlight the critical role of management styles in shaping the effectiveness of school canteen operations. Centralized management ensures strong administrative control and compliance with DepEd policies, but it may limit flexibility and innovation. Cooperative styles foster shared responsibility and transparency, yet they often face challenges in sustaining participation and financial accountability.

Secondary schools' adoption of student-led laboratory styles demonstrates the potential of integrating practical learning with service delivery. This approach not only supports nutrition but also enhances students' entrepreneurial and life skills. However, it requires close supervision to maintain food safety and operational standards.

The lack of significant difference between elementary and secondary schools in centralized and cooperative styles suggests that these arrangements are consistently applied across levels, though their effectiveness may vary depending on resources and leadership.

The problems encountered—such as inadequate facilities and compliance issues—underscore the need for stronger support systems. Policy refinement, capacity-building, and improved monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensure that canteens fulfill their mission of promoting student health and nutrition.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that public school canteens in Tabaco City Division employ diverse operations management styles, with centralized and cooperative arrangements being most common. Secondary schools additionally utilize student-led laboratory styles, integrating practical learning with food service. While management styles differ in application, their overall effectiveness is shaped by resources, leadership, and compliance with DepEd policies.

The hypothesis testing confirmed no significant difference between elementary and secondary schools in centralized and cooperative styles, indicating uniformity in these approaches. However, operational challenges such as limited facilities, budget constraints, and policy enforcement issues remain pressing concerns.

To address these, the study proposes an operations management plan emphasizing capacity-building for canteen personnel, stricter monitoring of compliance, collaborative governance involving stakeholders, and resource mobilization to upgrade facilities.

Ultimately, strengthening canteen management systems is vital not only for ensuring safe and nutritious meals but also for supporting student health, academic performance, and holistic development. The study provides valuable insights for DepEd, policymakers, and school administrators in refining policies and programs that safeguard children's right to proper nutrition and education.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgement

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest should be disclosed.

Statement of Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in compliance with institutional ethical standards and approved by the Schools Division Office of Albay.

Statement of Informed Consent

All participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Written consent was obtained from students and their parents prior to participation.

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