**Exploring the Perspectives of Grade 11 ABM Learners on School Canteen Services: Challenges and Opportunities**

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**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Background of the Study**

The school canteen is an integral part of learners' daily school experience. It serves not only as a place to eat but also as a space for learners to recharge, bond with friends, and share moments during breaks. Beyond providing meals, the canteen plays a role in shaping learners’ daily habits, food choices, and overall well-being. However, canteen services often face scrutiny regarding food quality, pricing, service efficiency, and cleanliness. These issues can greatly affect learners' satisfaction and their overall school experience. A poorly managed canteen may lead to learners skipping meals, opting for unhealthy snacks, or even avoiding the canteen altogether, which can have long-term effects on their health and academic performance.

Nutrition is closely linked to learners' academic performance. According to Tenzin et al. (2020, Bhutan), schools offering healthy lunch programs see improvements in learners' academic performance and attendance, indicating the crucial role of nutrition in educational outcomes. This finding highlights the importance of nutrition in supporting educational outcomes and suggests that the quality of food provided in school canteens can directly impact learners' learning and success. In the Philippines, nutrition remains a pressing issue, particularly among school-aged children. Malnutrition and unhealthy eating habits are still prevalent, with many learners relying on processed or fast food due to accessibility and affordability (Department of Education [DepEd], 2021). DepEd has implemented several feeding programs to combat malnutrition, recognizing the link between proper nutrition and academic performance. Despite these efforts, school canteens continue to struggle with offering nutritious, affordable, and appealing meal options that cater to all learners.

In addition to the quality of food, the social environment of the canteen is equally important. Travers and Carter (2021, United States) emphasized that positive social interactions during lunch periods significantly enhance learners' overall school experience. For example, their study noted that learners with visual impairments who experienced welcoming social interactions during lunch felt more included and satisfied at school. This highlights the need to create an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere within the school canteen. For many learners, the canteen is not just a place to eat but also a space where they form friendships, engage in meaningful conversations, and take a break from academic pressures. A school canteen that fosters inclusivity and social interaction can contribute to learners’ emotional and psychological well-being, helping them feel more connected to their school community (Johnson et al., 2021).

Moreover, involving learners in the decision-making process is critical. Brito-Silva et al. (2022, Brazil) found that incorporating learners’ feedback into menu planning not only increases meal consumption but also improves satisfaction. Engaging learners in this way encourages them to feel involved and ensures that the canteen aligns more closely with their preferences and needs. Despite these insights, gaps remain in actively seeking and addressing learners' perspectives, especially regarding challenges they face when purchasing food and their suggestions for improvement. In many Philippine schools, learners have little to no say in the food options available in their canteens. If school administrations were to involve learners in menu selection or allow them to provide feedback on pricing and service, canteens could better cater to their needs and increase overall satisfaction (Rahman, 2024). Schools that encourage participatory decision-making in canteen management can help instill responsibility and awareness in learners regarding food choices and nutrition.

Furthermore, unresolved issues within canteen services, such as limited food choices, inadequate seating capacity, crowded lines, and inconsistent hygiene standards, can negatively influence learners' overall school experience. As highlighted by Johnson et al. (2021, Australia), learners are more likely to perform better academically and socially in environments where their basic needs, including food and comfort, are met. In the Philippines, many school canteens, especially in public schools, are overcrowded and lack proper facilities (Galabo, 2019). Long queues, insufficient food supply, and unsanitary conditions can discourage learners from eating in the canteen, pushing them to seek alternatives outside the school premises, where food safety is not always guaranteed. Thus, focusing on learners’ canteen experiences is not just about addressing complaints but also about creating an environment that supports their holistic development. Schools should ensure that their canteens provide an organized, hygienic, and efficient dining experience to encourage healthy eating habits and promote well-being (Fabre & Pacpaco, 2020).

In Naguilian National High School, the canteen serves as an important facility where learners spend their time, making it essential to understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement. Given that learners rely on the canteen for nourishment and as a place to socialize, any shortcomings in service, food quality, or hygiene could significantly impact their school experience. This study aims to explore learners' experiences with canteen vendors, identify challenges, and gather actionable suggestions for enhancing services. By understanding the experiences and suggestions of learners, this study aims to explore both the challenges they face and the opportunities for enhancing canteen services. Ultimately, the findings of this research could serve as a foundation for improving canteen operations, ensuring that they meet learners' nutritional needs while creating a safe, inclusive, and efficient environment where they can thrive both academically and socially.

**Statement of the** **Problem**

This study aims to explore the overall experiences of learners with the school canteen’s vendors, identify the challenges learners face when purchasing food, and gather their suggestions for improving canteen services.

**General Objective**

To explore learners’ perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within the school canteen services.

**Specific Objectives**

1. To gather feedback from learners about their experiences with the canteen’s vendors.
2. To identify challenges faced by learners when purchasing food.
3. To gather insights into learners’ expectations and suggestions for improving the canteen services.

**Scope and Delimitation**

This study focuses on the perspectives of Grade 11 ABM learners at Naguilian National High School regarding their experiences with school canteen services. The study aims to identify challenges and explore possible opportunities for improvement based on the learners’ feedback.

The study is limited to Grade 11 ABM learners and does not include perspectives from other grade levels, school staff, or cafeteria vendors. Additionally, this research does not assess the financial or operational management of the canteen. Data will be collected through surveys and interviews conducted during the current academic year to ensure relevant and timely insights.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its focus on enhancing the canteen experience for learners, who play a vital role in the school community. The canteen is not merely a dining area; it serves as a crucial social hub where learners connect, share stories, and relax between classes. By investigating learners feedback on what they enjoy, what they dislike, and what changes they would like to see, the study aims to identify areas for improvement that can significantly impact their daily school experience.

The findings of this research will benefit various stakeholders:

1. **Learners:** By voicing their concerns and suggestions, learners can contribute to creating a canteen environment that better meets their needs.
2. **School Administration:** The study will provide data-driven insights to help the administration address learners concerns and improve cafeteria operations.
3. **Canteen Vendors:** Vendors can use the feedback to enhance their services, leading to increased learners satisfaction and potentially higher sales.
4. **Future Researchers:** This study can serve as a reference for similar research on school facilities and student welfare.

**Definition of Terms**

1. **Canteen Services:** Refers to the overall operation and management of food and beverage services within the school premises, including vendors, menu options, pricing, and cleanliness.
2. **Learner Perspective:** The opinions, experiences, and expectations of learners regarding the school canteen.
3. **Challenges:** Issues or difficulties learners face while using the canteen services.
4. **Opportunities:** Potential areas for improvement or innovation in canteen services that can enhance learner satisfaction.
5. **Vendors:** Individuals or businesses responsible for providing and selling food in the school canteens.

**CHAPTER II**

**REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

A well-functioning school canteen is more than just a place to buy food—it is a vital part of learners’ daily school experience. It provides an opportunity for them to access nutritious meals, interact with peers, and develop healthy eating habits. Various studies have examined the different aspects of canteen services, focusing on factors such as food quality, service efficiency, hygiene, pricing, and overall learners’ satisfaction.

Raya and Bajracharya (2023, Nepal) conducted a study at People's Campus in Nepal, assessing learners’ satisfaction with campus canteen services. The study found that learners rated the canteen services as moderately satisfactory, highlighting the need for improvements in service quality to enhance learners’ satisfaction. Schools must address these concerns by refining service strategies, ensuring consistency in food quality, and training staff to provide better service. Additionally, their findings emphasized that maintaining a clean environment and providing more diverse meal options contributed to an improved learners’ dining experience. The study also revealed that proper ventilation, noise management, and a welcoming ambiance significantly impacted learners' overall satisfaction. These findings suggest that canteen environments should be designed not only for food consumption but also as spaces conducive to relaxation and social interaction, which can enhance learners’ overall well-being.

A study published in the *Journal of Nutrition and Health* explored the relationship between learners' dietary habits and their satisfaction with school food services. The research found that higher satisfaction with food service quality was associated with better dietary habits among learners. This suggests that when canteens serve nutritious and visually appealing meals, learners are more likely to develop healthy eating habits. Schools should prioritize offering well-balanced meals and ensure that learners are educated about proper nutrition. Moreover, the study highlighted that schools implementing structured nutrition programs saw a decrease in learners opting for unhealthy snacks, further emphasizing the importance of a well-managed school canteen. Schools can integrate educational campaigns on nutrition within the canteen setting to encourage learners to make healthier choices. Additionally, offering meal options that align with dietary guidelines can significantly contribute to long-term health benefits, such as reduced risk of obesity and improved cognitive function among learners.

Moro (2024, Uganda) assessed learners' satisfaction with restaurant and food canteen services around Makerere University. The study found that while learners frequently used these services, there were concerns regarding food variety, pricing, and service efficiency. This suggests that institutions should focus on expanding food choices and streamlining service processes to improve the overall dining experience. Providing affordable yet diverse meal options could help cater to different learners preferences and budgets. The research further indicated that learners who had access to affordable, high-quality meals reported feeling more engaged in their academic activities and less likely to skip meals due to financial constraints. This study underscores the importance of balancing affordability with quality to ensure that learners consistently have access to meals that contribute to their health and academic success. Additionally, food insecurity has been linked to poorer academic performance, which highlights the significance of making school meals accessible and nutritious for all learners, regardless of socioeconomic background.

Galabo (2019, Philippines) conducted a study at Mintal Comprehensive High School in Davao City, examining how canteen service quality affects learners’ satisfaction. The study found that learners value a variety of food choices, cleanliness, and good customer service. Schools should implement regular feedback mechanisms to ensure continuous service improvements, addressing specific learners concerns about meal options, sanitation, and overall dining experience. Additionally, the study emphasized that allowing learners to participate in canteen decision-making, such as voting on menu items, significantly increased their satisfaction and engagement with canteen services. Giving learners an active role in shaping canteen policies can help create a sense of ownership and encourage them to utilize school meal services more frequently. When learners feel that their voices are heard, they are more likely to view the canteen as an integral part of their school experience, leading to increased usage and overall satisfaction.

Rahman (2024, Bangladesh, University of Dhaka) investigated learners’ satisfaction and ways to improve efficiency in university canteens. The study revealed that long wait times and limited menu options were common complaints among learners. By improving queuing systems, menu diversity, and staff responsiveness, canteens can better accommodate learners’ preferences and enhance their overall experience. Schools can also consider digital ordering systems or pre-ordering options to reduce wait times and congestion. Furthermore, Rahman’s study found that universities that implemented customer service training for canteen staff saw notable improvements in learners’ satisfaction and return rates. This suggests that service quality, including staff friendliness and responsiveness, is just as critical as the food quality itself in determining learners’ satisfaction. Providing professional development and training opportunities for canteen workers can ensure that learners receive high-quality service, making their dining experience more enjoyable and efficient.

Rawal, Kushwaha, and Gurung (2024, Nepal) investigated the relationship between canteen service quality and learners’ satisfaction in Nepalese colleges. The study found a positive correlation between service quality dimensions—such as cleanliness, staff friendliness, and food presentation—and learners’ satisfaction. Schools should invest in training programs for canteen staff to ensure high-quality customer service and a more welcoming environment. The study also indicated that having a visually appealing presentation of meals could encourage learners to choose healthier food options. This aligns with research suggesting that aesthetic appeal significantly influences food choices, particularly among younger consumers. By focusing on visual presentation and cleanliness, school canteens can create a more inviting dining environment that encourages learners to eat on campus rather than seeking less healthy alternatives elsewhere.

Dumlao (n.d., Philippines) explored the food preferences of learners at Bulacan Polytechnic College to develop an improved canteen management program. Many learners prioritize meals that are budget-friendly, but they also expect a certain level of quality. Schools must balance affordability with nutritional value to ensure that learners receive healthy, cost-effective meals. Offering budget-friendly meal bundles or meal plans can help learners make healthier choices without overspending. The study also found that learners preferred canteens that provided meal customization, such as allowing them to choose side dishes or adjust portion sizes. Implementing flexible meal options could improve learners’ satisfaction while ensuring that their nutritional needs are met. Schools should consider adopting flexible pricing strategies that make healthier options more accessible to learners from different financial backgrounds.

Fabre & Pacpaco (2020, Philippines) examined the management and operations of school canteens, proposing an enhanced development program to improve service efficiency and food quality. Schools should integrate structured operational reviews to assess and improve their canteen management, ensuring that food handling, inventory management, and waste reduction practices are optimized. Regular training for canteen staff on best practices in food service management was also suggested to maintain high standards. Additionally, the study emphasized the importance of sustainability, recommending that canteens implement eco-friendly practices such as reducing plastic waste and sourcing ingredients locally. Schools can take steps toward sustainability by offering reusable food containers, composting food waste, and partnering with local farmers to source fresh ingredients.

These studies collectively demonstrate the vital role of school canteens in learners’ life. They emphasize the importance of food quality, service efficiency, hygiene, and learners’ involvement in canteen management decisions. By addressing these areas, schools can enhance their canteen operations, ensuring they meet learners’ nutritional needs while also fostering a positive and enjoyable dining experience. A well-managed canteen can improve not just learners' satisfaction but also their overall well-being, helping them stay focused and energized throughout the school day. Furthermore, integrating learners’ feedback into canteen policies, introducing meal plans tailored to learners’ preferences, and ensuring a clean and welcoming environment can significantly elevate learners’ dining experiences and contribute to a more positive school culture. Schools that take an active role in continuously improving their canteen services can create a healthier and more satisfying experience for learners, ultimately benefiting their academic performance and overall development.

**CHAPTER III**

**Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive phenomenologicalapproach, to explore the experiences and perspectives of Grade 11 ABM learners regarding school canteen services. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of learners’ insights, challenges, and expectations regarding canteen operations by capturing and interpreting their lived experiences.

A phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study as it focuses on how individuals experience a particular phenomenon. In this case, it aims to understand learners' perceptions and interactions with school canteen services. By gathering first-hand narratives, the study seeks to provide a detailed and nuanced account of how these services impact learners’ daily school experiences. This method allows participants to express their thoughts freely, providing deeper insights into their needs and concerns beyond numerical data.

Since the study is qualitative, data will be collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, rather than surveys or statistical analysis. This ensures that the findings reflect the personal and shared experiences of the learners, highlighting recurring themes and patterns. The results of this research can guide school administrators in improving canteen operations, making them more responsive to learners' needs.

**Instrumentation**

To gather relevant data for this study, three primary research instruments will be employed: interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and an observation checklist. Each of these instruments is designed to capture different aspects of learners’ experiences with school canteen services, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.

The interview guide will serve as a key tool for collecting detailed individual responses from learners. This guide will consist of open-ended questions that explore various aspects of canteen services, such as food quality, pricing, hygiene, service efficiency, and overall satisfaction. The semi-structured format allows researchers to ask follow-up questions and clarify responses, making it possible to capture more nuanced insights into learners' experiences. By encouraging participants to share their thoughts in their own words, this method ensures that their unique concerns and suggestions are thoroughly documented.

In addition to individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) will be conducted to facilitate collective insights from learners. The FGD guide will include structured but open-ended questions designed to encourage interaction and the sharing of diverse perspectives. These discussions will provide learners with an opportunity to express their experiences in a dynamic setting, allowing researchers to identify common themes, differing viewpoints, and shared challenges. FGDs are particularly useful for uncovering group dynamics, as learners may feel more comfortable discussing their experiences when they realize others have similar concerns. The interactive nature of focus groups also enables researchers to observe how learners build upon each other’s ideas, leading to richer data collection.

Furthermore, the study will incorporate an observation checklist to objectively assess the physical condition and operations of the school canteen. The researchers will conduct non-participant observations, evaluating aspects such as cleanliness, food availability, service efficiency, and seating capacity. This method allows researchers to validate the responses gathered from interviews and FGDs by providing an independent account of the actual conditions of the canteen. Observations will be systematically recorded, ensuring consistency in data collection and allowing researchers to cross-check findings against learners’ narratives.

To enhance the credibility of the study, all research instruments will undergo validation by experts in qualitative research. This validation process ensures that the questions and observations effectively capture the necessary information without leading or influencing participants’ responses. Additionally, data triangulation will be employed by comparing insights from interviews, FGDs, and observations. This methodological approach strengthens the reliability of the findings by confirming recurring patterns and discrepancies across multiple data sources. By integrating these research instruments, the study aims to provide a holistic analysis of learners' perspectives on school canteen services, identifying both challenges and opportunities for improvement.

**Tools for Data Analysis**

The responses of the Grade 11 ABM learners will be transcribed verbatim to ensure that their exact thoughts and experiences regarding the canteen services are accurately recorded. Thematic analysis will be used as the primary tool for analyzing the gathered data. An inductive approach will be applied, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being pre-determined. The researchers will carefully read the transcriptions, highlight key statements, and sort out similar responses to identify patterns. These patterns will then be grouped into main themes and sub-themes, representing the common challenges and opportunities in the canteen services as perceived by the learners.