

**Is there room for all? Exploring the influence of growing food chains
on the local entrepreneurs in Capiz**

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of food chains has significantly transformed the local food industry in Capiz, affecting small food enterprises and local culinary traditions that contribute to community identity and economic growth. This study addressed the research gap on the lived experiences of local food entrepreneurs in Capiz, particularly regarding their operations, adaptive strategies, and sustainability amid growing competition from food chains. It explored the effects of food chain expansion on competition, customer retention, market opportunities, sales performance, and business strategies, while also identifying challenges and needed interventions. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study involved 10 local food entrepreneurs operating near food chains in Roxas City, Mambusao, and Sigma, as well as 10 government agency representatives who provided institutional perspectives. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews conducted in English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon and analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by triangulation and member checking to ensure credibility. Findings revealed that food chain expansion intensified competition, resulting in reduced customer flow, declining sales, and increased pressure on pricing and marketing strategies. Customers were drawn to food chains because of their strong branding, consistent quality, and modern dining environments, particularly appealing to younger consumers. Despite these challenges, local entrepreneurs showed resilience by improving product quality, offering unique local dishes, strengthening customer relationships, and using basic digital marketing. Government representatives emphasized the need for training, financial support, and marketing assistance. The study concluded that sustainable coexistence is possible when local entrepreneurs receive adequate resources, skills, and institutional support.

Keywords: Food chain expansion, local entrepreneurs, competition, business sustainability, Capiz.

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INTRODUCTION

The food industry continues to grow rapidly around the world, bringing with it major changes in the way people buy and consume food. In many countries, international and national

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food chains have expanded at a fast pace. They have introduced standardized menus, strong brand identities, and consistent customer service. These features often attract customers who prefer convenience and familiarity. Studies conducted in the United States and Southeast Asia show that the growing presence of large food chains has significantly changed the structure of local food markets. Researchers found that many small food businesses experience a decline in customer visits and sales because people are drawn to the reliability and strong promotional strategies of bigger companies. The expansion of food chains, therefore, creates a very competitive environment where small entrepreneurs must work harder to survive and remain relevant (Smith and Ong, 2021). Other international studies also observed that when food chains enter smaller communities, the competition becomes stronger, causing local food sellers to struggle with pricing, advertising, and customer retention (Rahman and Tan, 2022). These findings show that the rise of food chains is not only a matter of business growth but also an issue that affects the stability of small enterprises and local food cultures.

In the Philippines, the same pattern can be seen in many provinces and cities. The Philippine Statistics Authority reported in 2022 that franchise-based restaurants continue to be one of the fastest-rising business sectors in the country. Filipino consumers have shown a strong preference for fast food and other branded dining options, as they associate these establishments with quick service, clean spaces, and consistent food quality. Several local researchers have examined how this trend affects homegrown food entrepreneurs. Magtibay (2020) found that many local microbusinesses face difficulties when large food chains open within their areas. These difficulties include lower daily income, reduced customer loyalty, and the need to invest more time and resources just to keep up with the competition. Reyes (2021) also explained that national and international food chains have aggressive marketing strategies that are difficult for small food sellers to match. Their promotional materials, online presence, and discount programs often influence the decisions of customers, especially younger consumers. As a result, small food businesses must keep finding new ways to attract customers and preserve their place in the local food market.

Although various studies have described this situation at the national level, the experience within provinces is not identical. Each community has its own culture, economic conditions, and local business environment. For this reason, it is very important to examine how the rise of food chains affects specific areas such as Capiz. The province is known for its strong local food identity and for the presence of many small food vendors who rely on daily sales for their livelihood. In Roxas City and nearby municipalities, new food chains have opened in recent years. These include well-known fast-food restaurants, milk tea shops, and café-style establishments that are popular among students, workers, and families. Despite this visible change in the landscape of food businesses, there are very few studies that focus on how local entrepreneurs in Capiz are affected by this trend. Most existing research in the province discusses tourism, seafood production, agriculture, or related economic activities, but not the competition between local food sellers and food chain companies. This makes it difficult to understand what is truly happening to local microentrepreneurs in the food sector.

This lack of local studies presents several important research gaps. First, there is no detailed examination of how the growing number of food chains influences the daily operations, income, and customer flow of local food businesses in Capiz. Second, there is almost no documentation of how local entrepreneurs respond to the challenges brought by the food chain expansion. It is not clear whether they change their menu, price, customer service, or marketing strategies to remain competitive. Third, there is very limited information on how the presence of food chains affects the long-term sustainability of local businesses, especially those that are small, family-owned, or home-based. Fourth, there is a need to connect this issue with education, particularly because entrepreneurship education, livelihood training, and community development are part of the mission of the College of Education. Understanding

the situation of local entrepreneurs can help teachers, extension workers, and community leaders design better programs that support small business owners in adapting to the changing food industry.

Because of these gaps, this study titled “Is There Room for All? Exploring the Influence of Growing Food Chains on Local Entrepreneurs in Capiz” is timely and necessary. It will provide a clear picture of the current situation of local entrepreneurs and how they experience the expansion of food chains in their communities. By documenting their challenges, strategies, and perceptions, the study can help identify whether local businesses can truly coexist with large food chain companies. The findings will also be useful for local government units, business groups, and educational institutions. Policymakers can use the results to develop programs that support local entrepreneurs such as training on product improvement, digital marketing, financial literacy, and customer relations. Teachers and community extension workers can also create livelihood-based learning modules or seminars that will help small business owners improve their competitiveness and sustainability. Moreover, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how the food industry shapes the cultural and economic identity of Capiz.

This study also supports several Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. It is aligned with SDG 8, which promotes decent work and economic growth. By understanding how local entrepreneurs can maintain stable livelihood opportunities, the study helps advance inclusive economic development. It is also connected with SDG 9, which focuses on industry, innovation, and infrastructure. The findings of the study may encourage local entrepreneurs to develop more creative and innovative approaches in managing their businesses. Likewise, the study contributes to SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities because small entrepreneurs play a vital role in building strong communities and preserving local culture. Finally, the study supports SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production by encouraging sustainable local food practices and balance within the business environment.

In addition to the SDG alignment, this research corresponds to several Research Thrusts of the College of Education for 2024 to 2028. It strongly supports the thrust on Entrepreneurship and Community Development because it provides evidence about the real conditions of local businesses in Capiz. The results can serve as a basis for developing livelihood training modules, school-based business programs, and community extension activities that benefit small entrepreneurs. The study also aligns with the thrust on Cultural Heritage and Contextualized Learning because it helps preserve the province’s local food culture. By documenting how small food businesses operate and adapt, the research contributes to the understanding of local traditions and identities. The study also supports the thrust on Educational Leadership and Policy because the findings may help guide policy recommendations related to community livelihood, local business support, and economic development programs. It is also connected with the thrust on Techno Transfer because the insights generated from this research may lead to the creation of instructional materials, toolkits, or community resources that can be used by educators, students, and entrepreneurs.

The study aligns with the FORGE (Doctor of Education Major in Industrial Education) research agenda as it contributes to research-driven practice and innovation by examining how local entrepreneurs adapt to the expanding presence of food chains. It supports global engagement and cultural sustainability by emphasizing the preservation of local food identity amid globalization. Furthermore, the study reflects educational transformation through community partnership by providing evidence-based insights that can guide government agencies, educators, and stakeholders in developing programs that strengthen local enterprises and promote sustainable economic development in Capiz.

The researcher conducted this study to address the lack of localized research on the impact of food chain expansion in Capiç and to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of local food entrepreneurs. In the context of the country's current economic challenges, particularly rising inflation and increasing cost of living, the researcher sought to examine how small food business owners are able to sustain their operations and remain competitive. Specifically, the study aimed to explore how these entrepreneurs cope with pricing pressures, shifting consumer behavior, and the growing dominance of food chains. Through this, the researcher intended to identify the strategies, challenges, and opportunities encountered by local entrepreneurs to provide insights that can support their resilience, sustainability, and long-term growth.

The growing number of food chains in Capiç creates both opportunities and challenges. While food chains generate employment and offer new dining options, they also introduce a level of competition that can threaten the survival of small local businesses. Understanding this situation through a research-based perspective is essential. This study aims to fill the gaps in knowledge, document the experiences of local entrepreneurs, and provide meaningful recommendations that can support sustainable business growth in the province. Through this research, it becomes possible to explore whether there is indeed room for all in the rapidly changing food industry of Capiç.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to explore the extent to which the presence and continuous expansion of these growing food chains impact local entrepreneurs in Capiç. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do local entrepreneurs in Capiç perceive the expansion of growing food chains in terms of competition, customer retention, and market opportunities?
2. In what ways do growing food chains influence the sales performance, business strategies, and overall operations of local food businesses in Capiç?
3. What challenges do local entrepreneurs experience as a result of the increasing presence of food chains?
4. What adaptive strategies and innovations do local entrepreneurs employ to remain competitive amidst the rise of food chains?
5. What policy recommendations, programs, or evidence-based interventions may be developed to support local food entrepreneurs in strengthening their market presence and ensuring sustainable business growth?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods and procedures that guided the conduct of the study, describing the methodological perspective, the context of the study, the participants, the data gathering procedure, and the steps used in analyzing the data. These components ensured that the study was carried out systematically and ethically while generating meaningful insights from the experiences of local entrepreneurs in Capiç.

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine how the expansion of food chains has influenced local entrepreneurs in Capiç. A qualitative approach was suitable because the study aims to understand lived experiences, personal insights, and contextual realities, elements that are best captured through open-ended, narrative-based methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study used in-depth interviews to gather rich stories from local business owners who are directly affected by the presence and continued growth of national and international food chains in the province. These interviews

allowed participants to speak freely about their challenges, strategies, perceptions of competition, and sense of opportunity or threat. The design emphasized meaning-making, specifically understanding how entrepreneurs interpret the changes occurring in their local business environment.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who have significant experience and direct involvement in the local food sector. Interviews were conducted in English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon, depending on participant preference. Transcriptions were translated into English for analysis, and a back-translation procedure was performed to ensure accuracy and preserve the original meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the data, with codes, patterns, and recurring ideas organized into broader themes that reflect how local entrepreneurs are responding to the rise of food chains in Capiz. Triangulation was applied using interview data, observations, and supporting documents to improve the credibility of the findings. Strategies such as member checking, thick description, and an audit trail were implemented to ensure trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this methodological approach, the study provided a comprehensive and contextual understanding of how expanding food chains shape the operations, resilience, and sustainability of local entrepreneurs in Capiz.

The study was conducted in the province of Capiz, an area known for its rich culinary heritage and vibrant local food industry. In recent years, the province has witnessed the rapid expansion of national and international food chains, particularly in urban centers and developing municipalities. These new establishments are reshaping the local business landscape by introducing new forms of competition, modern marketing approaches, and standardized food products. Local entrepreneurs, many of whom operate small, family-owned enterprises, are experiencing significant changes in customer preferences, pricing systems, and market dynamics. The study explored how these shifts are affecting their operations, their ability to innovate, and their perception of long-term sustainability. The research was conducted across selected municipalities and Roxas City, capturing perspectives from entrepreneurs in both urban and rural areas. This diverse setting allowed the study to compare different experiences and identify how location influences exposure to food chains and their impacts. The overarching purpose of the study is to understand how these growing food chains influenced local businesses and whether local entrepreneurs feel there is still room for all in the evolving food market of Capiz.

The participants of the study were distributed across several municipalities, with their geographic location considered in relation to nearby food chain establishments. A total of 10 participants were included in the study, with the majority coming from Roxas City, accounting for five participants. This municipality hosts several prominent food chains such as Jollibee, Mang Inasal, and KFC, which may contribute to a more competitive food business environment for local entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, two participants were from Mambusao, where the presence of Mang Inasal represents the primary food chain competitor. In Sigma, three participants were identified, with Andok's serving as the nearby food chain influencing local food enterprises. Overall, the distribution reflects a strategic selection of participants from municipalities with varying levels of exposure to food chains, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives on competition and business dynamics among local food entrepreneurs in the province of Capiz.

The participants were also distributed according to district within the province of Capiz, reflecting the geographic scope of the study. The First District, particularly Roxas City, comprised the largest share with five participants, indicating a higher concentration of respondents in the more urbanized area of the province, where business activities and exposure

to food chain competition are more prominent. Meanwhile, the Second District accounted for a total of five participants, coming from the municipalities of Mambusao with two participants and Sigma with three participants. These areas represent semi-urban to rural settings, providing additional perspectives on local food entrepreneurship in locations with relatively fewer but still present food chain influences. The distribution demonstrates a balanced representation between the First and Second Districts, allowing the study to capture variations in experiences and perceptions of local food entrepreneurs across different geographic and economic contexts within Capiz.

The demographic and business profile of the 10 participants revealed notable characteristics relevant to the study. In terms of gender distribution, the majority of participants were female, accounting for eight out of ten, while only two were male. This suggests that local food entrepreneurship in the selected areas of Capiz is largely dominated by women. In terms of age, participants ranged from 32 to 53 years old, indicating that most are within the mature working-age group with considerable experience in managing their businesses. All participants operated local eateries, confirming that the study specifically targeted small, locally owned dine-in food establishments. With regard to nearby food chain competition, several participants were situated close to well-known establishments such as Mang Inasal, Jollibee, KFC, and Andok's, and notably, some participants were located near more than one food chain, highlighting a highly competitive business environment.

The first participant, a 45-year-old female, operated a local eatery situated 15 meters from Mang Inasal and 15 meters from Jollibee. The second participant, a 52-year-old female, also operated a local eatery located 20 meters from Mang Inasal and 15 meters from Jollibee. The third participant, a 34-year-old female, ran a local eatery positioned 30 meters from both Mang Inasal and Jollibee. The fourth participant, a 44-year-old female, operated a local eatery 80 meters from KFC and 100 meters from Jollibee. The fifth participant, a 32-year-old male, similarly operated a local eatery at a distance of 80 meters from KFC and 100 meters from Jollibee. The sixth participant, a 37-year-old female, ran a local eatery located 20 meters from Andok's. The seventh participant, a 46-year-old female, operated a local eatery 30 meters from Mang Inasal. The eighth participant, a 44-year-old female, managed a local eatery situated 60 meters from Mang Inasal. The ninth participant, a 48-year-old female, operated a local eatery 25 meters from Andok's. The tenth participant, a 53-year-old male, ran a local eatery located 30 meters from Andok's.

In terms of proximity, all participants were operating within a range of 15 to 100 meters from these food chains, indicating very close physical competition. Several participants were positioned as near as 15 to 30 meters, suggesting direct exposure to customer overlap and competitive pressure. This close distance emphasizes the intensity of competition faced by local food entrepreneurs and provides a strong basis for examining how they adapt and sustain their businesses in the presence of established food chains. The profile of participants reflects a group of experienced local eatery owners operating in proximity to major food chains, making them highly relevant sources of insight for understanding competitive dynamics in the local food industry in Capiz.

In addition to the local entrepreneurs, the study also included 10 participants from various government agencies. In terms of gender distribution, the majority of respondents from the government sector were female, comprising seven participants, while three were male. With respect to age, participants ranged from 32 to 54 years old, suggesting that most respondents are in their mid-career stage and possess substantial professional experience in their respective fields. The participants were drawn from key government agencies that play significant roles in supporting local entrepreneurs, including the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Labor and

Employment (DOLE), the Department of Agriculture (DA), and various local government units (LGUs) such as business permit and licensing offices and tourism offices.

The eleventh participant was a 45-year-old female assigned to the DTI Negosyo Center in Pontevedra. The twelfth participant was a 43-year-old female from DSWD in Sigma. The thirteenth participant was a 54-year-old female from DOLE in Sigma. The fourteenth participant was a 44-year-old female from the Department of Agriculture in Sigma. The fifteenth participant was a 32-year-old male serving as a DTI Field Officer in Roxas. The sixteenth participant was a 42-year-old male serving as DOLE Livelihood Program Coordinator in Mambusao. The seventeenth participant was a 32-year-old female from the LGU Sigma Business Permit and Licensing Office. The eighteenth participant was a 41-year-old male from the DTI Negosyo Center in Sigma. The nineteenth participant was a 46-year-old female from DOLE in Roxas. The twentieth participant was a 50-year-old female from the Sigma Local Tourism Office.

Geographically, the participants were assigned across different municipalities in Capiz, including Pontevedra, Sigma, Roxas City, and Mambusao. Their roles ranged from negosyo center personnel and field officers to livelihood program coordinators and local government staff, all of whom are directly involved in the implementation of programs and services that support micro and small enterprises, including local food entrepreneurs. The participants represent a diverse group of government practitioners with relevant expertise and direct engagement in entrepreneurial support systems, making them well-positioned to provide valuable insights and recommendations for strengthening the competitiveness of local food businesses in Capiz.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were carefully established to ensure that the participants selected for the study possess relevant experiences and insights aligned with the research objectives. For the local entrepreneur participants, inclusion required that individuals be residents of Capiz or persons with strong ties to the local food industry within the province, ensuring familiarity with the local business environment and food culture. Only those who are owners, co-owners, or operators of locally owned dine-in food establishments were included, as the study specifically focuses on small-scale, non-franchise eateries. Participants also had to operate within a 100-meter radius of other local food entrepreneurs or clusters of food businesses, a criterion essential for capturing the dynamics of direct competition in areas where food chains and local eateries coexist. Moreover, only micro and small enterprises with at least six months to one year of continuous operation were selected to ensure sufficient experience in managing businesses and responding to market challenges. Participants were required to be 18 years old and above and actively involved in the day-to-day operations of their business, including customer interaction and competitive decision-making. Willingness to participate in interviews or surveys and the ability to communicate effectively in English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon were also necessary to facilitate accurate data collection.

On the other hand, individuals who did not have a meaningful connection to Capiz or were not directly involved in the local food business sector were excluded from the study. This included operators of purely online or delivery-based food businesses, as well as those affiliated with national or international food chains and franchises. Businesses located beyond the specified 100-meter radius, medium to large-scale enterprises, and newly established ventures with less than six months of operation were also excluded to maintain consistency in the study parameters. Additionally, individuals who were not directly engaged in business operations, below 18 years old, or unwilling or unable to effectively communicate their experiences were not considered for participation.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for government agency participants were similarly defined to ensure the selection of knowledgeable and contextually relevant informants. Participants were required to be government employees or staff assigned to agencies involved in business development, livelihood programs, agriculture, labor, or local economic development, such as the DTI, DOLE, DSWD, DA, and various LGU offices. This ensured that participants possess institutional knowledge and are directly involved in supporting local enterprises. Participants must be currently assigned or have direct work experience within the Province of Capiz, particularly in municipalities such as Sigma, Roxas City, and Pontevedra, so that their insights are grounded in the local context and reflect the actual conditions faced by food entrepreneurs in the area. Only those with direct involvement in programs, services, or policy implementation related to local food entrepreneurs and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) were included, as they can provide informed perspectives on support mechanisms and challenges. To ensure reliability of responses, participants were required to have at least one year of work experience in their current role or related functions, indicating sufficient exposure to program implementation and stakeholder engagement. They must also be 18 years old and above, capable of providing informed consent, and actively willing to participate in interviews or surveys. Furthermore, the ability to communicate effectively in English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon was necessary to facilitate clear and accurate data collection. Individuals who are not affiliated with relevant government agencies or those assigned outside Capiz were excluded, as their perspectives may not reflect the local context. Government personnel with no involvement in programs supporting food entrepreneurship or MSMEs were also excluded to maintain the focus of the study. Newly assigned employees with less than one year of experience were not considered due to their limited exposure to program implementation, and those who are below 18 years old, unwilling to participate, or unable to effectively communicate their insights were likewise excluded. These criteria ensured that the selected government participants are experienced, contextually relevant, and capable of providing valuable professional insights to address the study.

The study used several research instruments to gather the information needed, with the goal of understanding how the increasing presence of food chains affected small business owners in different municipalities of Capiz. The main instrument for this research was a researcher-made interview guide containing open-ended questions that encouraged participants to freely share their experiences. It was designed to support a smooth and flexible conversation with the respondents, allowing them to express their thoughts in their own words. The interview guide was reviewed and approved by the advisory committee and underwent expert validation in skills and language to ensure clarity, appropriateness of language, and alignment with the objectives of the study before it was used.

The interview questions focused on topics such as daily business operations, changes in customer behavior, challenges faced due to the presence of food chains, and strategies used to remain competitive. Specifically, the interview guide was structured according to the statement of the problem, consisting of three questions for SOP 1 on perceptions of competition, customer retention, and market opportunities; three questions for SOP 2 focusing on sales performance, business strategies, and operations; two questions for SOP 3 addressing the challenges experienced by entrepreneurs; and three questions for SOP 4 covering adaptive strategies and innovations. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to ensure accuracy and to build rapport with the participants. Since many of the participants were more comfortable speaking in Hiligaynon or Filipino, the interviews were conducted in these languages. The responses were recorded and transcribed word for word, after which the transcripts were translated into English for data analysis, with a language expert helping ensure the accuracy of the translation.

To support the interview data, the study also collected short notes during the interviews. These notes included observations about the business environment, customer flow, and visible competition between small businesses and food chains. When allowed by the participants, photos of the business location were also taken to help describe the setting in more detail. Before the actual data collection, the interview guide was tested with a small group of entrepreneurs to check if the questions were clear and easy to understand, and feedback from this pilot test was used to improve the guide.

An online survey through Google Forms was also utilized to gather data from selected government agency personnel, ensuring convenience and wider accessibility for respondents who may have limited availability for face-to-face interviews. The Google Forms instrument included structured and open-ended questions focusing on government perspectives regarding programs, support mechanisms, and interventions for local food entrepreneurs affected by the expansion of food chains in Capiz. In particular, the survey included two key questions aligned with SOP 5, which focused on identifying needed support and proposing concrete interventions for local food entrepreneurs. Through these instruments, the study gathered rich and meaningful information from small business owners and government stakeholders who were directly involved in or affected by the spread of food chains in Capiz.

The data for this study were gathered through interviews with small business owners in Capiz and an online survey directed at government agency personnel. The entire data gathering process took place over a period of around three months. Interviews were conducted depending on the availability of the participants, including weekends when they were free. This followed the idea of Tesch (2013), who explained that qualitative data is best collected in time and place settings that are comfortable for the participants. Because of this, the schedule and location of interviews were adjusted based on what was most convenient for the local entrepreneurs.

The first step of the study involved identifying the target participants, who were small business owners operating near growing food chains such as Jollibee, KFC, Mang Inasal, and Andok's. The researcher visited selected areas such as Roxas City, Mambusao, Sigma, and Ivisan to locate entrepreneurs who managed carinderias, small restaurants, and similar food-related businesses. To build trust, the researcher spent time in the community before conducting the formal interviews. This included informal conversations with business owners about their experiences running a small business and the challenges they faced with the presence of nearby food chains. These early discussions helped the researcher establish rapport and gain the confidence of the respondents. The researcher also coordinated with barangay officials and local business groups to identify qualified participants.

A total of 20 participants were selected using purposive sampling. The selection was based on their location, business type, and direct exposure to food chain competition. Snowball sampling was also used, meaning participants recommended other small entrepreneurs who could contribute meaningful insights. The primary method of data collection for small business owners was in-depth interviews with the selected participants. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to openly share their experiences while still guiding the conversation toward topics needed for the study. The questions focused on areas such as changes in customer flow, business challenges, adjustments in business strategies, and the overall impact of nearby food chains.

Since many participants were more comfortable speaking in Hiligaynon or Filipino, the interviews were conducted in these languages. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder to ensure that all details were captured accurately. The recorded interviews were transcribed word for word and translated into English, with a language expert assisting in verifying the accuracy of the translation using a back-translation process. During the

interviews, the researcher also took notes regarding the business environment, location, and visible signs of competition between small establishments and nearby food chains. When permitted, photos of the business sites were also taken to support the contextual description of the setting. Meanwhile, the data collected through the Google Forms online survey were systematically organized and analyzed alongside qualitative interview data, allowing the researcher to triangulate findings from both primary interviews and government perspectives.

After all interviews and survey responses had been completed, the researcher organized and cleaned the collected data. Interview transcripts and Google Forms responses were reviewed carefully to prepare them for analysis. The qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, identifying patterns, repeated ideas, and emerging themes related to the experiences of small business owners and government stakeholders. The researcher also examined external materials that provided context to the situation of small businesses, such as local news articles, market reports, and community observations. These secondary sources helped support and strengthen the findings of the study. Through this process, the data gathering procedure provided a comprehensive understanding of how growing food chains influenced the operations of small local entrepreneurs in Capiz, as well as how government agencies responded through policies and support programs.

The data analysis procedure for this study followed a systematic approach that helped the researcher understand how growing food chains influenced small local entrepreneurs in Capiz. The process focused on interpreting the qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data analysis involves classifying and interpreting words, statements, and narratives to understand both the explicit and underlying meanings expressed by participants. This study used thematic analysis to identify patterns and insights describing the experiences of local food entrepreneurs.

The process began with coding the data, where the researcher reviewed the collected information and assigned labels to important ideas or patterns, helping to break down the data into smaller and more manageable parts. This was followed by analytical or axial coding, where the researcher looked for connections among the codes, with similar codes grouped to identify relationships and patterns across the data. After that, the researcher developed categories or subthemes by combining related codes into broader groups, with these categories representing key concepts found in the data and helping to organize the findings more clearly. Finally, the process ended with identifying themes, which are the main ideas that summarize the overall findings of the study and provide a deeper understanding of the research topic. To ensure credibility, the study applied triangulation using interview data, observations, and supporting documents, as well as member checking to validate the accuracy of participants' responses. Through this process, the researcher was able to construct meaningful interpretations of how local entrepreneurs experience and respond to the expansion of food chains in Capiz.

In conducting the study, the researcher acknowledged his own subjectivity and the influence of personal experiences in shaping the research process. Having lived in Capiz, the researcher had observed how the growth of food chains changed the local business environment, including how small food entrepreneurs tried to maintain their livelihood while larger and more established chains continued to expand in the province. This personal connection to the community created a strong interest in understanding how these changes affected local business owners who relied on daily customer flow for their income. The researcher was aware of his position as both an observer and a member of the community. As someone who grew up buying food from both small local eateries and well-known food chains, the researcher understood that personal experiences and beliefs may have influenced how the data were interpreted. This awareness formed part of the researcher's reflexivity, which involved continuously checking personal biases to ensure that these did not affect how

participants' experiences were represented. The researcher aimed to approach every stage of the research with fairness and openness.

During the interviews, the researcher was mindful of the importance of trust and comfort. Since business concerns and personal livelihood can be sensitive topics, especially for small entrepreneurs facing competition from food chains, the researcher created a respectful and supportive atmosphere. This helped participants express their experiences sincerely, whether these involved challenges, opportunities, or changing customer behaviors. The researcher respected the different perspectives of the participants, understanding that each story reflected unique struggles and hopes related to their business. The researcher also recognized that familiarity with local food practices and business culture may have shaped the questions asked and the interpretation of responses. While striving to remain objective, the researcher also drew from knowledge of how local entrepreneurs operate, how food chains attract customers, and how communities respond to new food establishments. This background guided the study but did not overpower the voices of the participants.

To ensure credibility, the researcher used various data collection methods, such as interviews and observation, while remaining aware of the need to separate personal views from actual findings. The qualitative data were analyzed in a way that highlighted the participants' own words and experiences, helping to create a clear picture of how small entrepreneurs responded to the growing presence of food chains in their communities. By acknowledging his subjectivity, the researcher aimed to conduct the study with honesty and awareness, ensuring that the results presented a meaningful and accurate understanding of how the rise of food chains affected local entrepreneurs in Capiz and how these business owners adapted to changes in their environment.

In conducting the study, several ethical considerations were observed to ensure that the research was carried out with integrity, respect for participants, and full adherence to ethical standards. These considerations guided the entire research process to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants. The study aimed to conduct responsible, transparent, and respectful research that valued the experiences of local entrepreneurs. Since the topic involved livelihood, business competition, and personal challenges, the study ensured that all participants felt safe and respected while sharing their stories. The research also aimed to provide meaningful insights into how the growth of food chains affected small business owners in Capiz, while contributing to broader discussions on local business sustainability and community economic changes.

The research process prioritized the comfort and convenience of the participants. Interviews were scheduled based on the participants' availability, including weekends or hours when they were free from business operations. The researcher ensured that the interview setting was quiet, private, and comfortable so that participants could openly share their experiences without pressure or interruption. Participants were reminded that they were free to speak only about what they were comfortable sharing and that they could pause or stop the interview at any time. Cultural sensitivity was an important part of the research design. The researcher ensured that all interactions were respectful of the participants' background, business values, and local customs. A friendly and understanding approach was used, especially since many participants were small business owners who may have felt vulnerable when discussing the challenges they faced. As a simple gesture of appreciation, the researcher offered refreshments after each interview to thank participants for their time and cooperation.

Strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. All personal information, business details, and interview responses were treated as private and used only for research purposes. Names and specific business identities were not included in the final report, and all

data were stored securely. The researcher also explained the purpose of the study clearly before the interview and obtained voluntary consent from each participant. All phases of the research were monitored and guided by the research adviser and committee to ensure that ethical standards were observed from the start of data collection until the completion of the study. Through these ethical considerations, the study aimed to build trust, gather authentic insights, and uphold high ethical responsibility while exploring the influence of growing food chains on local entrepreneurs in Capiz.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the data obtained from the study along with the corresponding analyses and interpretations. The data presentation, analyses, and interpretations were grounded in information gathered from participants' responses to an interview guide that was validated by the advisory and examining committees following a pilot interview. The study employed a qualitative research design using purposive sampling to select local food entrepreneurs and key informants in Capiz as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted with the aid of the validated interview guide, and the qualitative data obtained were transcribed, translated, and validated using a back-translation strategy carried out by a bilingual expert. The transcriptions were subsequently analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved the systematic organization of responses, translations, subthemes or categories, and major themes. The discussion that follows is anchored entirely on the data gathered from participants and is interpreted in direct relation to the objectives of the study. The organization of the data presentation, analyses, and interpretation follows a constructivist approach that seeks to describe and deepen the understanding of participants' lived experiences. Each research problem is addressed through the presentation of major themes and their corresponding subthemes, supported by representative response transcriptions drawn directly from participant accounts.

Local food entrepreneurs' perceptions on expansion of food chains

The results of the thematic analysis indicate that local entrepreneurs in Capiz perceive the expansion of food chains as creating a complex business environment characterized by competition pressure, challenges in customer retention, and emerging market opportunities. These interconnected themes reflect how entrepreneurs continuously navigate both the negative and positive impacts of food chain proliferation within their localities. These findings are largely in conformity with existing literature, which consistently describes the expansion of food chains as a transformative force that reshapes local market dynamics and intensifies competition among small businesses.

In terms of competition pressure, several participants described food chains as strong competitors due to their established branding, attractive locations, and aggressive marketing strategies. This perception was evident among four participants who emphasized that food chains pose a significant challenge to small businesses. As Participant 3 shared, "Sa akon panan-aw, dako gid nga kompetisyon ang mga food chain kay damo na sila branch kag nami ang lugar" (In my view, food chains are a big competition because they have many branches and their places are nice), which highlights how the expansion and physical appeal of food chains intensify competition. Similarly, Participant 6 noted that "daw indi gid malikawan ang kompetisyon... laban gid sila sa marketing kag promos" (competition really cannot be avoided... they are strong in marketing and promotions), emphasizing the advantage of food chains in promotions and advertising. These observations conform with the findings of Chen and Lee (2017) and Kim and Park (2019), who emphasized that food chains utilize strong

branding and aggressive marketing strategies that attract customers and heighten competitive pressure on small enterprises.

However, it is also important to note that three participants pointed out that competition is not solely attributed to food chains but is more strongly felt among co-carinderias within the same area. Participant 8 explained that "mas nabatyagan ko nga mas dako gid ang kompetisyon namon sa iban nga carinderia diri sa baryo" (I feel that our competition is actually stronger with other carinderias here in the village), suggesting that businesses offering similar products and price ranges create a more direct and immediate form of competition. This finding presents a partial non-conformity with the literature, which tends to emphasize food chains as the primary source of competitive pressure. Instead, the results highlight that localized, same-category competition among microenterprises remains equally, if not more, significant in certain contexts, particularly in rural or community-based settings. Participant 10 further elaborated on this dual reality, noting that while food chains had indeed become competitors and such competition could not be avoided, the stronger competition was felt from other carinderias in the area because they offered similar prices and products. Participant 9 echoed this sentiment, observing that despite appearing to be overshadowed by food chains, the competition felt more immediate from fellow carinderias located nearby. Moreover, Participant 6 also pointed out the advantage of food chains in terms of marketing and promotional strategies, noting that while competition was unavoidable, food chains held the advantage in marketing and promotions, suggesting that small entrepreneurs perceived themselves at a disadvantage when it came to advertising and attracting customers.

Despite these competitive pressures, customer retention remains a significant strength among local entrepreneurs. A majority of seven participants reported maintaining loyal customers who continue to patronize their businesses due to familiarity, affordability, and preference for home-cooked meals. Participant 1 stated that regular customers do not go to others because they are truly loyal, preferring food that has flavor, and particularly home-cooked food with soups, which demonstrates the importance of taste and customer satisfaction in sustaining loyalty. Participant 2 shared that loyal customers remain, mostly the same as before, though visits could fluctuate as customers seemed to switch places when bored. Participant 7 expressed that regular customers remained and did not leave because they were accustomed to the food and already knew the owner, and would not easily leave even with the presence of food chains, emphasizing the role of familiarity and personal connection. Participant 8 reinforced the same idea of strong customer loyalty, noting that regular customers stayed because they were used to the food and knew the owner. Participant 10 further showed that loyalty could also lead to customer return, noting that while some customers left, others came back because they were accustomed to the food and specifically sought out the owner's unique preparation. These findings align with studies such as Balandan and Cruz (2022) and Cruz and Valdez (2016), which highlight the role of community ties, personalization, and cultural authenticity in maintaining customer loyalty among small businesses.

However, this loyalty is not absolute, as four participants observed a decline in some customers, particularly those who are influenced by the appeal of food chains. Participant 7 shared that some customers were lost, especially younger ones, indicating that younger consumers are more likely to shift preferences due to trends and exposure to food chains. Participant 3 noted that some customers really left, though others returned because of good treatment and familiarity. Participant 6 observed that some went to food chains, especially when they had the budget, but others still returned because they were accustomed to the establishment. Participant 9 noticed that the loyalty of some customers decreased because they were attracted to food chains. These observations are in strong conformity with the findings of

Rodriguez (2019), Reyes and David (2020), and Dizon and Ramos (2020), which indicate that younger consumers tend to prefer convenience, branding, and modern dining experiences offered by food chains. These findings suggest that while loyalty persists, it is continuously challenged by changing consumer behavior.

At the same time, the expansion of food chains also presents market opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Three participants identified the potential to gain new customers as population and consumer activity increase in areas where food chains operate. Participant 3 observed that the growing number of people in the city creates opportunities to attract new patrons. Participant 6 shared that more people coming into the area meant there was still a chance to grow. Participant 10 clearly saw that there was still an opportunity in affordable, mass-based food because not everyone could always eat at food chains. In addition, three participants recognized the need to adapt and improve their businesses in response to these changes. Participant 4 stated that while food chains seemed to be harming small businesses, there was still a place for local enterprises, and identified the possibility of adopting some of their styles. Participant 5 expressed the realization that some degree of change, even just small adjustments, was necessary to keep up, highlighting the role of adaptation in maintaining competitiveness. Participant 9 expressed the need to innovate, not only because of food chains but also because of other similar businesses keeping pace. These findings conform with the studies of Nguyen and Tran (2021) and Martinez and Cruz (2021), which suggest that the presence of food chains, while competitive, also encourages innovation and strategic adaptation among local entrepreneurs.

The theme of competition pressure thus reflects a dual reality: while food chains introduced heightened competition due to their resources, branding, and promotions, local entrepreneurs experienced more immediate and stronger pressure from co-carinderias offering similar products within their locality. This highlights the complex competitive environment in Capiz, where both large-scale food chains and small-scale local businesses significantly influence entrepreneurial experiences. The findings imply that local food entrepreneurs must strengthen their competitive advantages by focusing on product quality, affordability, and strong customer relationships. Since competition is also highly localized among similar businesses, differentiation strategies such as unique offerings and improved service are essential. The need for adaptation further underscores the importance of continuous learning and innovation in sustaining business operations. For stakeholders and policymakers, the findings highlight the necessity of providing support mechanisms such as training, marketing assistance, and access to resources to help local entrepreneurs remain competitive. This implication is consistent with policy-oriented studies in the literature, such as those by Delos Reyes (2021) and Jimenez (2019), which emphasize the need for institutional support to address structural disadvantages faced by small entrepreneurs. Strengthening these enterprises is crucial not only for individual livelihoods but also for maintaining a vibrant and sustainable local food industry in Capiz.

Influence on sales, strategies, and operations of growing food chains in local food entrepreneurs

The thematic analysis reveals that the expansion of food chains significantly influences the sales performance, product management, and business operations of local food entrepreneurs in Capiz. These themes highlight how entrepreneurs experience both challenges and adaptive responses as they navigate a more competitive market environment. Overall, these findings are in strong conformity with the reviewed literature, which consistently identifies food chain expansion as a factor that reshapes sales patterns, operational practices, and strategic behavior among small food enterprises.

In terms of sales performance, the majority of participants reported a decline or fluctuation in sales, as indicated by five participants, namely Participant 3, Participant 6, Participant 7, Participant 9, and Participant 10. Participant 3 highlighted situational decreases in sales particularly during the entry of food chains, stating "May times nga nagnubo gid ang akon baligya, labi na kung bag-o pa lang bukas ang food chain" (There are times when my sales really decrease, especially when a food chain has just opened). Participant 6 emphasized fluctuating sales performance, noting that income fluctuates with some days being good and others slow. Participant 7 described a continuous decrease in income compared to before. Participant 9 reported an initial decline but noted that the competition felt more strongly when the number of carinderias in the area increased. Participant 10 highlighted a decline with eventual adjustment, observing that while income decreased, it was possible to adjust over time, and the impact was felt even more acutely when a new carinderia opened nearby. Many of these participants described experiencing reduced income or inconsistent daily earnings, particularly during the entry or expansion of food chains in their area. This suggests that food chains attract a portion of the customer base, leading to instability in sales among local businesses. This finding conforms with studies by Gomez and Tan (2020), Tan and Ho (2020), and Montelibano (2022), which report that the presence of food chains redirects customer flow and reduces income stability among small food vendors.

However, two participants, namely Participant 1 and Participant 2, reported stable or unchanged sales, indicating that some businesses are able to maintain consistent income despite increased competition. Participant 1 expressed that at present, income has not really changed and has remained steady, though noting that if expenses had not increased due to rising costs of onions, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, and cooking oil, income would have been higher. Participant 2 attributed the decline in sales more to external factors like the pandemic rather than food chains, sharing that while there was a real decline during the pandemic as fewer people were eating out, nothing has really changed since then. This stability may be attributed to factors such as strong customer loyalty, established reputation, or location advantages. This presents a partial non-conformity with the dominant literature, which generally emphasizes negative sales impacts, by suggesting that not all local entrepreneurs are equally affected. Instead, the findings support more recent studies by Balandan and Cruz (2022) and Manalo and Reyes (2024) indicating that businesses with strong customer relationships and identity-based positioning can sustain performance despite competitive pressures. Overall, these findings demonstrate that while food chains can negatively impact sales for many entrepreneurs, the extent of this impact varies depending on the resilience and positioning of the business.

With regard to product management, five participants, namely Participant 3, Participant 5, Participant 6, Participant 7, and Participant 9, emphasized the need for improvement in food quality as a key response to competition. Participant 9 emphasized maintaining product identity and customer preference, expressing that the cooking was made tastier because that is the owner's strength and what regular customers are looking for, reflecting a strategy of leveraging uniqueness and customer loyalty rather than directly imitating food chains. Participant 3 shared an effort to make food tastier while maintaining cleanliness. Participant 5 emphasized continuous improvement, stating that cooking was improved to ensure it is tastier and consistently good every day. Participant 6 explained fixing the serving and ensuring consistency in taste. Participant 7 adjusted ingredients and slightly lowered the price so customers could still afford the food. Entrepreneurs focused on enhancing taste, consistency, and overall product quality to meet customer expectations and retain patronage. This finding conforms with Martinez and Cruz (2021) and Ordoñez and Beltran (2018), who emphasize that product improvement and menu innovation are essential adaptive strategies for small food

businesses facing increased competition. This indicates that quality remains a primary competitive advantage for local food businesses.

Additionally, three participants, namely Participant 2, Participant 6, and Participant 7, reported making price adjustments due to rising costs of ingredients, highlighting the financial pressures faced by small enterprises. Participant 2 maintained the existing menu but adjusted pricing based on rising costs, reflecting a cost-based pricing strategy rather than changes driven directly by food chains. Participant 7 adjusted ingredients and slightly lowered the price so customers could still afford the products. These adjustments often involve balancing affordability with profitability, as entrepreneurs strive to keep prices competitive while managing increasing expenses. This aligns with the findings of Robles and Hamada (2019) and Ilagan (2020), which explain that small businesses face higher cost variability due to decentralized sourcing, limiting their ability to match the pricing strategies of large food chains. The findings suggest that product-related strategies are essential for survival, requiring continuous improvement and careful pricing decisions.

In terms of business operations, four participants, namely Participant 3, Participant 5, Participant 7, and Participant 10, reported making changes in their schedule and service, such as adjusting operating hours, improving service speed, or modifying service systems to better accommodate customer needs. Participant 3 adjusted the schedule and strengthened service. Participant 5 changed the schedule and opened earlier to accommodate customers looking for breakfast. Participant 7 added more hours of operation to capture customers throughout the day. Participant 8 explained that adjustments in schedule and slight changes in menu were made based on regular customers' preferences, driven not by food chains but by local competition. These operational changes reflect the entrepreneurs' efforts to remain responsive and competitive in a dynamic market. This finding conforms with Nguyen and Tran (2021), who note that the presence of food chains introduces new service benchmarks that small businesses attempt to follow or adapt to.

Furthermore, three participants, namely Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 8, highlighted improvements in cleanliness and presentation, recognizing the importance of creating a more appealing and professional business environment. Participant 4 emphasized cleanliness and speed, ensuring cleanliness and making the service faster. This is consistent with the findings of Hernandez and Lopez (2017) and Kim and Park (2017), which show that perceived cleanliness, service quality, and presentation significantly influence customer preference and repeat patronage. This suggests that beyond food quality, the overall customer experience plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining customers. The implications of these findings suggest that local entrepreneurs must adopt a customer-centered and strategic approach to remain competitive. Emphasis on quality, affordability, and efficient service is essential in maintaining customer loyalty and sustaining business operations. Additionally, the need for operational and product improvements highlights the importance of continuous innovation and adaptability in the food industry. This implication is consistent with policy and entrepreneurship studies in the literature by Delos Reyes (2021) and Jimenez (2024), which emphasize that strengthening the capabilities of small entrepreneurs is critical to balancing the structural advantages of food chains. For policymakers and support institutions, the results underscore the necessity of providing interventions such as training in cost management, product development, and service improvement, as well as support in stabilizing business operations. Strengthening these areas can enhance the capacity of local entrepreneurs to withstand competition and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the local food sector.

Challenges experienced by local food entrepreneurs

The thematic analysis highlights the major challenges experienced by local food entrepreneurs in Capiz as a result of the increasing presence of food chains. These challenges are categorized into three key themes: competitive disadvantage, customer loss, and financial constraints, which collectively reflect the difficulties faced by small businesses in sustaining and growing their operations. Overall, these findings are in strong conformity with the reviewed literature, which consistently identifies structural disadvantages, shifting consumer behavior, and financial limitations as key barriers faced by local entrepreneurs in competitive food markets.

In terms of competitive disadvantage, three participants, namely Participant 3, Participant 6, and Participant 10, expressed that they are unable to match the promotions and pricing strategies of food chains, which places them at a significant disadvantage in attracting customers. Participant 3 shared that it is really difficult because the prices and promotions of food chains cannot be matched. Participant 6 stated that it is difficult to compete with their promotions because their offers seem very cheap. Participant 10 noted that while it is difficult to compete with the marketing of food chains because they have a big budget, what matters more is how to outperform other carinderias in the same area. Food chains often offer discounted meals, bundle deals, and aggressive marketing campaigns that small entrepreneurs cannot replicate due to limited resources. Additionally, one participant, Participant 5, highlighted the challenge of strong brand recognition, noting that food chains are more widely known and trusted by customers. This established brand identity makes it easier for food chains to attract patrons, further intensifying competition. These findings strongly conform with the studies of Ahmed and Kumar (2017), Jimenez (2019/2024), and Wang and Chen (2016), which emphasize that food chains possess pricing power, marketing dominance, and brand recognition that create unequal competitive conditions for small businesses. These findings suggest that local entrepreneurs struggle to compete on equal terms, particularly in areas where financial capacity and marketing power are critical.

With regard to customer loss, three participants, namely Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 7, reported difficulty in attracting customers, especially as food chains become more visible and accessible. Participant 2 directly expressed the difficulty of retaining customers in a competitive market, stating that losing customers is a real concern and that it is difficult for customers to just come to one place when there are many sellers. Participant 4 emphasized that the main difficulty is attracting customers, indicating that even sustaining current customers is not enough as gaining new ones becomes increasingly difficult in a saturated market. Participant 7 reinforced this issue by noting the difficulty of getting new customers, especially when there are already many options available. The increasing number of food options leads to greater competition for customer attention, making it harder for small businesses to stand out. Furthermore, two participants, namely Participant 6 and Participant 7, observed a decrease in customer loyalty, as some patrons are drawn to the convenience, branding, and perceived quality of food chains. Participant 6 pointed out that pricing and promotions of food chains also contribute to customer loss, as their offers seem very cheap, leading customers to perceive greater value for money and reducing patronage of local businesses. This indicates that customer preferences are shifting, particularly among consumers who are influenced by trends and modern dining experiences. This finding is in strong conformity with the works of Rodriguez (2019), Reyes and David (2020), and Alegre and Mateo (2017), which show that consumers increasingly prefer convenience, consistency, and branded dining experiences, often leading to reduced patronage of local food businesses. The findings highlight that maintaining a stable customer base is becoming more challenging for local entrepreneurs in a highly competitive environment.

In terms of financial constraints, three participants, namely Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 10, identified limited capital for expansion as a major challenge. Participant 3 emphasized limited capital as a barrier, sharing that it is difficult to expand because the capital is small. Participant 5 expressed that expansion is not yet possible because of insufficient capital. Participant 10 emphasized the need for careful financial management, stating that it is necessary to be thrifty and plan carefully, especially since many are competing in the same business. Due to reduced income and increased competition, entrepreneurs find it difficult to invest in business growth, such as upgrading facilities, expanding operations, or introducing new products. Similarly, three participants, namely Participant 2, Participant 7, and Participant 9, reported slowed business growth, indicating that their ability to scale their operations has been significantly affected. Participant 2 highlighted that the growth of the business slowed down and the focus shifted to sustaining rather than expanding, as immediate expansion was not possible. Participant 7 noted that the growth of the business is really slow now. Participant 9 shared that the effect was significant and expansion plans were put on hold. Instead of focusing on expansion, many entrepreneurs prioritize sustaining their current operations. These findings conform with Lopez and Ching (2017), Dizon (2019), and Rogerson and Rogerson (2019), which highlight that small businesses often face capital limitations that restrict growth and increase vulnerability in competitive environments. There is minimal non-conformity observed in this section, as the experiences of participants closely mirror the patterns described in the literature. However, a slight divergence can be noted in the degree of impact, as not all entrepreneurs reported severe financial decline, suggesting that some businesses may still possess coping mechanisms or localized advantages not fully captured in broader studies. The implications of these findings suggest that local entrepreneurs need to develop strategies that strengthen their competitive positioning, such as differentiating their products, enhancing customer relationships, and focusing on unique value offerings that food chains cannot easily replicate. Additionally, there is a clear need for external support in areas such as financial assistance, marketing capability, and business development to help address these challenges. For policymakers and support institutions, the results emphasize the importance of creating programs that improve the financial capacity, market competitiveness, and sustainability of local food entrepreneurs. This implication is consistent with policy-oriented literature by Delos Reyes (2021) and Flores and Caballero (2022), which highlights the need for targeted interventions to address structural disadvantages and support MSME resilience. Ensuring such support is crucial in enabling local entrepreneurs to continue thriving despite the growing presence of food chains.

Adaptive strategies and innovations of local food entrepreneurs

The thematic analysis highlights the adaptive strategies and innovations employed by local food entrepreneurs in Capi to remain competitive amidst the growing presence of food chains. These strategies are grouped into three major themes: customer relationship strategy, product and pricing strategy, and business innovation, reflecting the proactive efforts of entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses in a challenging market environment. These findings are in strong conformity with the literature, which emphasizes that small entrepreneurs respond to competitive pressures through relational strengths, product differentiation, and continuous innovation.

In terms of customer relationship strategy, six participants, namely Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 7, Participant 8, and Participant 10, emphasized strengthening relationships with customers as a key approach to maintaining competitiveness. Participant 2 focused on strengthening relationships with regular customers and slightly lowering prices so they would return, reflecting the importance of loyalty-building strategies.

Participant 3 underscored the role of relationships, expressing that the relationship with customers is what they come back for. Participant 4 shared that building connections with the community is a big help, suggesting that businesses rely not only on individual customers but also on broader social networks. Participant 7 emphasized relational loyalty, stating that the relationship with people is important because that is what they return for, aligning with the idea that personal connection outweighs competition from food chains. Participant 8 indicated that improving customer service was a direct response to competition. Entrepreneurs focused on building loyalty among their suki or regular customers by fostering familiarity, personal connection, and consistent engagement. Additionally, five participants, namely Participant 1, Participant 6, Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 10, highlighted the importance of good customer service and trust. Participant 1 emphasized that people appreciate good entertainment and a good approach as a form of competitive advantage in personal interaction. Participant 6 highlighted that caring for customers is important because they are the ones who provide support to the business. Participant 9 shared that trust is what regular customers base their decisions on, and if they trust the owner, they will return even when there are many other options. Participant 10 further emphasized that relationship and service are important because customers who know the owner and are treated well will not easily transfer to others. These findings strongly conform with Balandan and Cruz (2022) and Cruz and Valdez (2016), which highlight that personalization, community ties, and cultural connection are key strengths that allow local entrepreneurs to retain loyal customers despite the dominance of food chains. These findings indicate that interpersonal relationships and trust serve as strong competitive advantages for local businesses, as they offer a level of personalization that food chains often lack.

With regard to product and pricing strategy, four participants, namely Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 7, reported offering affordable prices to attract and retain customers, particularly those who are price-sensitive. Participant 2 focused on affordability and product freshness, slightly lowering prices so customers would return and ensuring that food is freshly cooked every day. Participant 3 highlighted both price and quality improvements, lowering the price and improving the cooking, while also adding menu items and offering take-out to increase value and convenience. Participant 5 emphasized value-based offerings through the introduction of affordable combo meals, allowing customers to perceive greater value for their money. Participant 7 offered a home-cooked style as a differentiation strategy, noting that this is something food chains do not have, and also offered home-style cooking that is unique and similar to food at home. By keeping their products within the budget of their target market, entrepreneurs are able to remain accessible to a wider range of consumers. Similarly, four participants, namely Participant 1, Participant 3, Participant 6, and Participant 9, focused on improving food quality, particularly emphasizing home-style cooking or "lutong bahay" as a unique selling point. Participant 1 actively promoted products, especially new ones, and used buy 1 take 1 promotion to attract customers. Participant 6 focused on quality and affordable prices so customers would not have difficulty choosing, and added snacks and light meals such as pancit and puto to provide more choices. Participant 9 focused on the uniqueness of the food so as not to be the same as other carinderias, and offered homemade recipes prepared exclusively by the owner so customers have a reason to come back. This approach highlights the importance of taste, authenticity, and familiarity in influencing customer preference. These findings are in conformity with studies by Martinez and Cruz (2021), Ordoñez and Beltran (2018), and Capili and Fernandez (2022), which emphasize that product quality, menu innovation, and culturally rooted offerings enhance the competitiveness of small food businesses. However, a slight non-conformity can be observed in the reliance on

affordability as a primary strategy. While literature by Jimenez (2019/2024) and Robles and Hamada (2019) suggests that food chains typically dominate in pricing due to economies of scale, the findings indicate that local entrepreneurs still attempt to compete through affordability within their niche markets. This suggests that pricing strategies among small businesses may be more flexible and context-specific than commonly presented in broader studies.

In terms of business innovation, four participants, namely Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 7, and Participant 10, reported adding new menu items or products to diversify their offerings and respond to changing customer preferences. Participant 2 actively promoted products especially when something new was available, and used buy 1 take 1 offers as promotional strategies to attract customer notice. Participant 5 highlighted affordability and variety through innovation by introducing affordable combo meals. Participant 7 added snacks and light meals such as pancit and puto to give customers more options. Participant 10 added budget meals and affordable food suitable for students and workers. These responses demonstrate how entrepreneurs innovate by expanding menu choices and offering products that cater to different customer segments. Furthermore, two participants, namely Participant 3 and Participant 6, introduced additional services such as delivery and take-out, enhancing convenience for customers and aligning with modern consumption patterns. Participant 3 added menu items and offered take-out services, and also emphasized adding a daily menu with food that is freshly cooked every day to maintain customer interest. Participant 6 offered delivery services to make it easier for customers to order and to prevent them from going elsewhere. Another two participants, namely Participant 6 and Participant 9, emphasized enhancing the uniqueness of their offerings, particularly through home-style cooking and personalized recipes that differentiate them from competitors. Participant 6 offered a home-cooked style as something food chains do not have. Participant 9 offered homemade recipes prepared personally so customers have a reason to return. Participant 10 further enhanced service to be more friendly and personal, recognizing that this is something food chains and even other stores cannot provide. These findings conform with Nguyen and Tran (2021), Lopez and Umali (2021), and Mendoza and Li (2019), which highlight that innovation, digital adaptation, and service diversification are key strategies for small businesses to remain competitive in evolving markets. These innovations demonstrate how local entrepreneurs leverage flexibility and creativity to sustain their market presence. The implications of these findings suggest that the survival and success of local food businesses depend largely on their ability to differentiate themselves through personalized service, product quality, and adaptability. Unlike food chains, local entrepreneurs can capitalize on their close connection with customers and their flexibility in operations. However, sustaining these strategies requires continuous effort and support. Thus, there is a need for interventions that enhance entrepreneurs' capacity in customer service, product development, and innovation, enabling them to further strengthen their competitive advantage and ensure long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive food industry.

Proposed interventions to support local food entrepreneurs

The thematic analysis highlights the proposed interventions to support local food entrepreneurs in Capiz, as identified by participants based on their experiences and observations. These interventions are grouped into five major themes: capacity building and skills development, financial and resource support, market access and linkages, product development and innovation, and institutional and program support, reflecting a comprehensive approach to strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of local food businesses. These findings are in strong conformity with the reviewed literature, which

consistently emphasizes that MSME sustainability depends on integrated support systems combining skills development, financial assistance, market access, innovation, and institutional collaboration.

In terms of capacity building and skills development, five participants, namely Participant 11, Participant 12, Participant 13, Participant 15, and Participant 16, emphasized the need for training on marketing, pricing, business management, and product standardization. Participant 11 highlighted that many entrepreneurs have good products but lack knowledge about packaging, pricing, and market positioning to compete with big food chains, underscoring the gap between product quality and market readiness. Participant 12 emphasized the importance of foundational business skills, particularly in costing, marketing, and financial management, reflecting the need for structured training programs that go beyond basic food preparation. Participant 13 pointed out the importance of equipping entrepreneurs with knowledge on entrepreneurship and labor compliance, explaining that as businesses grow, they need to understand proper employment practices, wages, and workplace safety, highlighting the role of skills development in ensuring sustainable and compliant business operations. Participant 15 reinforced the importance of continuous learning, stressing that training should not be a one-time intervention but must include follow-up support. Participant 16 emphasized the need for improving product consistency and compliance with food safety standards, noting that many have good products but lack consistency in quality and branding. This indicates that many local entrepreneurs possess strong culinary skills but lack the technical knowledge required to effectively position and manage their businesses in a competitive market. Additionally, four participants, namely Participant 11, Participant 12, Participant 15, and Participant 17, highlighted the importance of mentoring, coaching, and continuous technical support. Participant 11 suggested that entrepreneurs would benefit from structured coaching through incubation programs, receiving coaching from industry experts and government agencies, reflecting the value of guided, hands-on learning. Participant 17 highlighted the importance of hands-on training and inspection support, noting that this will improve both quality and efficiency of operations. These findings suggest that one-time training programs are insufficient, and that entrepreneurs require sustained guidance to apply their learning and adapt to changing market conditions. These findings conform with studies by Torralba and Rivera (2021), Fernandez and Aquino (2023), and Garcia and Palma (2019), which highlight that continuous capacity-building and entrepreneurship training significantly improve MSME resilience and competitiveness.

With regard to financial and resource support, three participants, namely Participant 12, Participant 15, and Participant 18, identified capital assistance, micro-grants, and financial aid as critical interventions. Participant 12 underscored the challenge of limited startup capital, explaining that many entrepreneurs start their business from very small capital, making it difficult to expand or improve their equipment. Participant 15 emphasized the importance of sustainable financing and financial capability, noting that many small food entrepreneurs struggle to scale due to limited capital and weak financial literacy, suggesting that financial support must be paired with financial management training to ensure long-term sustainability. Participant 18 highlighted the broader impact of financial and resource assistance, stressing that supporting food entrepreneurs not only helps businesses grow but also creates jobs for the local community. Similarly, three participants, namely Participant 13, Participant 16, and Participant 18, emphasized the need for provision of equipment, starter kits, and production resources. Participant 13 highlighted the importance of providing equipment and starter kits, noting that many small food businesses rely on basic tools and that modern equipment would make production faster and better. Participant 16 emphasized that financial and material

support should also address product development and compliance requirements, noting that local food entrepreneurs need support in product development, packaging, and compliance with food safety standards. These findings are in conformity with Rogerson and Rogerson (2019), Dizon (2019), and Ilagan (2020), which explain that access to capital and production resources is a key determinant of MSME survival and growth in competitive markets.

In terms of market access and linkages, three participants, namely Participant 11, Participant 15, and Participant 19, highlighted the need for access to wider markets, including trade fairs, digital platforms, and institutional buyers. Participant 11 noted that usually the market of local entrepreneurs is only within the barangay or municipality, and that connecting them to trade fairs, digital platforms, and institutional buyers would significantly increase their growth opportunities. Participant 15 underscored the importance of expanding market reach through structured opportunities, particularly for small-scale entrepreneurs who struggle to access consistent selling channels. Participant 19 highlighted the importance of exposure to broader markets, including tourism-related opportunities and institutional buyers, suggesting that local entrepreneurs should be integrated into larger economic activities to increase visibility and demand. Additionally, three participants, namely Participant 12, Participant 17, and Participant 19, proposed the establishment of local markets, food bazaars, and selling venues. Participant 12 emphasized the value of creating community-based market opportunities, such as organizing community food markets or weekend food bazaars where local entrepreneurs can sell their products. Participant 17 noted that structured selling opportunities can improve both visibility and income generation for entrepreneurs. Furthermore, three participants, namely Participant 14, Participant 18, and Participant 20, emphasized the importance of strengthening farm-to-market and supplier linkages. Participant 14 emphasized that a reliable supply of local agricultural raw materials is important and that strengthening connections between farmers and food entrepreneurs' benefits both sectors. Participant 18 highlighted the value of direct sourcing, explaining that food businesses can directly source their ingredients from local producers, ensuring product quality and supporting local producers while reducing supply chain inefficiencies. Participant 20 further emphasized that strengthening these linkages contributes to a more sustainable local food ecosystem, particularly in areas rich in agricultural and marine resources. Participant 16 also pointed out that improving market access is closely tied to product readiness in terms of quality, packaging, and compliance, which influence the ability of entrepreneurs to enter more competitive markets. These findings conform with Quintero and Salazar (2022), De Guzman et al. (2018), and Mendoza and Li (2019), which emphasize that market linkages, local branding initiatives, and digital platforms significantly enhance MSME market visibility and sustainability.

With regard to product development and innovation, three participants, namely Participant 11, Participant 16, and Participant 19, identified the need for improvement of packaging, branding, and product presentation, which are crucial in enhancing product appeal and competitiveness. Meanwhile, three participants, namely Participant 14, Participant 17, and Participant 20, emphasized value-adding, food processing, and product diversification, enabling entrepreneurs to create new products and maximize the use of available resources. These findings conform with Martinez and Cruz (2021), Ordoñez and Beltran (2018), and Capili and Fernandez (2022), which highlight that innovation in product development, branding, and value-adding strategies enhances competitiveness and market differentiation among small food enterprises.

In terms of institutional and program support, three participants, namely Participant 13, Participant 18, and Participant 20, suggested the formation of cooperatives, associations, and networks, which can strengthen collaboration, increase bargaining power, and improve access to resources. Participant 13 noted that if entrepreneurs can form associations or cooperatives, they will have greater bargaining power and more organized operations, reflecting the role of

collaboration in improving efficiency and market positioning. Participant 18 further emphasized the broader developmental impact, underscoring that supporting food entrepreneurs helps businesses grow and also creates jobs for the local community. Participant 20 highlighted the importance of strengthening networks among stakeholders, particularly between producers, entrepreneurs, and support agencies, implying that coordinated efforts can lead to a more sustainable and resilient local food system when supported by structured programs and partnerships. Additionally, three participants, namely Participant 13, Participant 17, and Participant 20, emphasized the need for integration with employment, livelihood, and government programs, ensuring that entrepreneurs receive comprehensive and coordinated support. Participant 17 noted that structured support systems providing continuous training and operational guidance will improve both quality and efficiency of operations. These findings conform with Delos Reyes (2021), Jimenez (2019/2024), and Suarez (2020), which emphasize that strong institutional frameworks and government support systems are essential in ensuring equitable opportunities and sustainability for MSMEs. The implications of these findings suggest that stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and development organizations, must design and implement holistic intervention programs that address these interconnected needs. Programs such as food business incubation, livelihood support initiatives, and market linkage platforms can significantly improve the resilience and growth potential of local entrepreneurs. By providing continuous, coordinated, and targeted support, these interventions can empower local food businesses to effectively compete with food chains and contribute to the development of a more inclusive and sustainable local economy. This implication is consistent with policy and development studies in the literature, which emphasize that integrated MSME support systems are essential for balancing structural inequalities created by franchise expansion.

C.A.P.I.Z. (Comprehensive Advancement Program for Inclusive Zonal) Food Enterprises

In response to the cumulative findings of the study, the C.A.P.I.Z. (Comprehensive Advancement Program for Inclusive Zonal) Food Enterprises was developed as a unified initiative designed to strengthen local food entrepreneurs across the province. The program was developed to address the growing challenges brought by the expansion of food chains by providing a structured and sustainable support system for micro and small food businesses. It emphasized inclusive growth, ensuring that entrepreneurs from different municipalities and business capacities were supported through targeted interventions.

One of its core components was the Capiz Local Food Incubation Project, which provided training, mentoring, packaging development, and market linkage opportunities for entrepreneurs. This project aimed to enhance the skills of local business owners and improve their ability to scale their operations, enabling them to become more competitive in a rapidly evolving food industry. Complementing this was the Community Food Enterprise Support Project, which offered micro-grants, mentoring, and organized community food bazaars. This initiative focused on providing entrepreneurs with much-needed capital and accessible selling platforms, allowing them to expand their reach and increase their income through direct engagement with consumers.

The Food Enterprise Livelihood Enhancement Project further strengthened the program by delivering equipment support, skills training, and employment linkage. This project aimed to improve production efficiency and create job opportunities, thereby contributing not only to business growth but also to local economic development. Lastly, the Farm-to-Food Enterprise Linkage Project connected farmers with food entrepreneurs while also providing food

processing training. This initiative sought to strengthen the local supply chain by promoting the use of locally sourced ingredients and enhancing collaboration between producers and business owners, ultimately supporting the sustainability of the local economy.

Taken together, the findings of this study present a coherent and internally consistent account of the experiences, challenges, strategies, and support needs of local food entrepreneurs in Capiz in the face of growing food chain expansion. The thematic analysis conducted across the four research areas revealed that local entrepreneurs perceive the expansion of food chains as generating a complex competitive environment shaped by competition pressure, customer retention difficulties, and emerging market opportunities. The influence of food chains on sales, product management, and business operations was found to be significant and varied, with most entrepreneurs reporting sales decline or fluctuation while some maintained stable performance through strong customer relationships and product differentiation. The challenges experienced by participants clustered around competitive disadvantage, customer loss, and financial constraints, all of which are consistent with structural vulnerabilities documented in the literature on MSMEs in developing economies. In response, entrepreneurs demonstrated considerable resilience and adaptability through customer relationship strategies, product and pricing innovations, and business diversification. The proposed interventions identified by participants, and subsequently formalized into the C.A.P.I.Z. Food Enterprises program, provide a comprehensive framework addressing the interconnected needs of capacity building, financial support, market access, product development, and institutional collaboration. These findings collectively address the research objectives of the study and contribute to the expanding body of knowledge on MSME competitiveness, entrepreneurial resilience, and local food economy sustainability in the Philippine provincial context. The insights generated herein lay the empirical and analytical groundwork for the conclusions, recommendations, and program proposals presented in the succeeding chapter.

CONCLUSION

The study provided a focused examination of how the rapid expansion of food chains affected local food entrepreneurs in Capiz, generating insights that support small businesses, preserve local food identity, and guide community-based development efforts. Built on a strong conceptual and theoretical foundation, the research viewed knowledge as shaped by lived experiences and social interactions, exploring how entrepreneurs interpreted competition, adapted to changing market conditions, and maintained their identity within a rapidly evolving food industry. Related literature reinforced these concerns by revealing consistent patterns across different contexts, where food chain expansion influenced consumer behavior, intensified competition, and created challenges for small businesses, while simultaneously pushing them toward innovation and adaptation. Guided by key questions on perception, operational impact, encountered challenges, competitive strategies, and available forms of support, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design centered on the lived experiences of participants. In-depth interviews with local entrepreneurs and relevant stakeholders, thematic analysis, triangulation, and validation procedures collectively ensured the credibility and depth of the findings.

The findings of the study offer comprehensive insights into the experiences of local food entrepreneurs in Capiz in the context of food chain expansion. Local entrepreneurs generally perceive the growth of food chains as a significant source of competition that affects customer retention and market share, largely attributing this to brand recognition, standardized products, and perceived quality. Despite these competitive pressures, entrepreneurs also recognize opportunities to strengthen their businesses by improving their offerings and

leveraging strong customer relationships, indicating that food chain expansion functions simultaneously as a threat and as a motivating force for adaptation and growth. The influence on sales performance, business strategies, and operations is most evident in the form of sales instability, increased operational demands, and the need for continuous improvement, prompting entrepreneurs to adjust pricing strategies, enhance product quality, and refine service delivery. Several interconnected challenges compound these pressures, including pricing difficulties, limited customer retention, constrained marketing capabilities, and the need for product differentiation, all of which create structural disadvantages for small food businesses relative to larger, well-established chains.

In response to these challenges, local entrepreneurs employ various adaptive strategies, including strengthening customer relationships, maintaining affordability while ensuring product quality, and introducing new or improved products and services. Their capacity for personalized service and operational flexibility provides a distinct advantage over food chains, enabling them to retain loyal customers and respond swiftly to market demands. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions encompassing capacity building and skills development, financial and resource support, improved market access, product innovation, and strengthened institutional and program support, all of which are essential for enhancing the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of local food businesses.

Based on the foregoing findings, the study draws several key conclusions that reflect the complex and nuanced dynamics of food chain expansion within the local entrepreneurial landscape of Capiz. The study concludes that while food chains intensify the competitive landscape, their impact is neither uniform nor entirely detrimental. Local entrepreneurs perceive food chains as formidable competitors owing to established branding, standardized offerings, and broader market reach; however, competition is also deeply localized, with many entrepreneurs reporting greater pressure from fellow small businesses and nearby carinderias that directly target the same customer base. The influence of food chain expansion is most evident in business performance and operations, where many entrepreneurs reported declines or fluctuations in sales following the entry of these establishments, reflecting broader shifts in consumer preferences and purchasing behavior. Nevertheless, this effect is not absolute, as businesses that rely on loyal customers and consistently deliver quality products demonstrate the capacity for stable performance, affirming that local enterprises can remain viable under certain conditions despite structural disadvantages.

The study further concludes that significant challenges persist, particularly those rooted in competitive disadvantage arising from limited financial and operational capacity. These limitations prevent small entrepreneurs from matching the pricing strategies, promotional offers, and marketing efforts of larger food chains, thereby creating an uneven business environment that constrains expansion and market sustainability. Yet within this context of adversity, local entrepreneurs demonstrate notable resilience and resourcefulness through strategic and relationship-focused approaches. The emphasis placed on personalized service, the cultivation of trust, and the maintenance of close connections with patrons collectively strengthen customer loyalty in ways that larger food chains often struggle to replicate. These strengths affirm that the competitiveness of local enterprises is not solely a function of financial capacity but is also grounded in the relational and cultural dimensions of their practice.

The study's conclusions also affirm the indispensable role of targeted interventions in enabling local food entrepreneurs to compete more effectively and sustainably. Capacity building in marketing, pricing, business management, and product standardization, alongside continuous mentoring, coaching, and technical support, are identified as essential components of any meaningful support framework. Local entrepreneurs are encouraged to adopt a strategic

and opportunity-oriented mindset that leverages their unique strengths, including personalized service, cultural authenticity, and community connection, while entrepreneurship educators and trainers may design programs that reframe competition as a driver for innovation. Local government units and policymakers may initiate awareness campaigns and learning forums that foster adaptive thinking and resilience among micro, small, and medium enterprises. Customer-centered strategies involving consistent product quality, competitive pricing, and efficient service delivery should be prioritized, supported by targeted training in cost management, operations efficiency, and service excellence. Accessible financial support mechanisms, including micro-grants, soft loans, and subsidy programs, complemented by simplified business registration processes and cooperative formation, can collectively reduce costs and enhance competitiveness at the community level. Local entrepreneurs are further encouraged to continuously innovate through unique product development, enhanced customer engagement, and the utilization of digital platforms for marketing and sales, with educators integrating innovation, product development, and digital entrepreneurship into their training programs.

Ultimately, the study strongly recommends a comprehensive and integrated support framework developed through coordination among local government units, policymakers, academic institutions, and development organizations. Such a framework may encompass capacity building and skills development, financial and resource support, market access and linkage initiatives, product development and innovation support, and institutional strengthening through cooperatives and networks. Programs such as food enterprise incubation, farm-to-market linkage systems, digital market enablement, and micro, small, and medium enterprise support hubs hold considerable potential in enhancing the long-term sustainability of local food businesses. Continued research examining these dynamics is likewise encouraged to inform evidence-based policymaking and program design. In conclusion, while the expansion of food chains presents clear and documented challenges, it also creates meaningful opportunities to strengthen local enterprises through proper support, sustained innovation, and community-driven efforts that honor the cultural and economic significance of local food entrepreneurship in Capiz.

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