

The effect of Inventory Management Practices and Performance of Small-Scale Industries in Uganda: A case of Rukiga District

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of inventory management practices on the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District. This section presents the findings according to the study's objectives, namely: to examine the effect of reducing holding costs on SSI performance, to assess the effect of minimizing waste on Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance, and to establish the effect of improving efficiency on Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance. Data were collected from 115 respondents and analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. Descriptive analysis, which entailed describing single variables and their attributes, was presented using frequency tables. At the bivariate level, a Pearson correlation matrix was employed to ascertain the relationships between the predictor variables and the dependent variable, while a linear regression model was used to fit the data. Findings from the regression analysis indicated that reducing holding costs ($R = 0.762$), minimizing waste ($R = 0.689$), and improving efficiency ($R = 0.829$) positively and significantly influence the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District. The study concludes that effective inventory management through reducing holding costs, minimizing waste, and improving efficiency significantly enhances Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance by increasing productivity, lowering operational costs, improving product quality, and strengthening competitiveness, profitability, and long-term sustainability. Accordingly, it is recommended that SSIs in Rukiga District adopt efficient inventory systems such as EOQ and JIT, implement lean practices, recycling, staff training, and waste-reducing technologies, and enhance efficiency through process streamlining, modern management practices, resource optimization, and appropriate technology utilization to improve overall performance.

1.0 Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between inventory management practices and the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District. Inventory management practices were treated as the independent variable, while Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance was treated as the dependent variable. The independent variable was conceptualized as reducing holding costs, minimizing waste, and improving efficiency, whereas performance was conceptualized in terms of operational efficiency, financial performance, and customer satisfaction.

Inventory management refers to the systematic oversight of ordering, storing, and utilizing inventory components, such as raw materials, semi-finished goods, and finished products. In small-scale industries (SSIs), where resources are often limited, efficient inventory management practices play a crucial role in balancing customer demand and minimizing costs associated with overstocking and stock outs. A well-managed inventory system ensures that products are available when needed without excessive surplus, which can tie up valuable capital and lead to wastage.

Mark et al. (2022) emphasize that Economic Order Quantity (SSIs) must adopt inventory management practices that not only meet customer needs but also ensure profitability and sustainability. Practices such as setting reorder levels, conducting periodic stock audits, and using automated replenishment tools help avoid stock outs and excess inventory, which can strain financial resources and hinder operational performance.

Techniques like Economic Order Quantity (EOQ) and Just-in-Time (JIT) are widely used in inventory management to optimize stock levels and reduce operational costs. Economic Order Quantity (EOQ), for instance, helps businesses determine the optimal order quantity that minimizes the combined costs of ordering and holding inventory, thus ensuring a balance between supply and demand (Billah et al., 2021). The JIT method, on the other hand, helps reduce inventory waste by ensuring that materials and products are delivered only when needed, thereby improving resource utilization (Ivander, 2024). These methods have become especially vital for Small-Scale Industries (SSIs), which may not have the financial or storage capacity to maintain large inventory volumes. However, the implementation of these techniques requires a stable and reliable supply chain, a factor that can be difficult to achieve in rural settings like Rukiga District, where infrastructure and supply chain stability are often problematic.

Advanced inventory management tools, such as Vendor-Managed Inventory (VMI) and ABC analysis, further enhance inventory control and operational efficiency. VMI allows suppliers to take responsibility for managing stock levels at the retailer's location, ensuring timely replenishment and minimizing the risk of stockouts. This practice eases the burden on small businesses by outsourcing inventory monitoring to trusted suppliers, thereby reducing the need for in-house inventory tracking (Lotfi et al., 2022). ABC analysis, on the other hand, categorizes inventory based on the value and usage frequency of items, allowing businesses to focus their resources on high-priority products that directly affect the bottom line (Hariga et al., 2022). By prioritizing critical inventory, Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) can streamline their stock control processes and improve resource allocation, leading to better financial outcomes and more effective decision-making.

The integration of digital tools in inventory management can dramatically enhance the precision and timeliness of inventory control. Cloud-based inventory management systems, mobile applications, and real-time tracking tools enable businesses to monitor their inventory levels accurately and adjust as needed. This technology helps minimize human errors associated with manual systems and enhances inventory forecasting, ultimately leading to improved decision-making and resource allocation. Despite the benefits of digital tools, the adoption of such technologies among Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Uganda remains relatively low, mainly due to insufficient Information Computer Technology infrastructure, a lack of digital literacy, and limited access to affordable devices and software. Therefore, to bridge this gap, it is essential to develop tailored, low-cost digital solutions that meet the specific needs and capabilities of small-scale businesses in rural regions.

2.0 Review of related literature

2.1. Reducing holding costs on the performance of Small Scale Industries

Gurtu, (2021) conducted a study on Optimization of inventory holding cost due to price, weight, and volume of items. The inventory carrying cost has been assumed uniform for all products in an organization or a warehouse. This assumption is not valid for a diversified range of items in an organization or warehouse. This paper tested this hypothesis of variations in inventory holding costs in a warehouse in two industries based on the physical nature and the price of products. It is found that organizations with a wide variety of products need to calculate the inventory holding cost for each item (SKU) rather than using an average percentage cost of inventory. Inventory holding costs of items in two different organizations were calculated based on the various factors, including the actual cost of space due to the voluminous nature of the items with their existing inventory policies. A variation in inventory holding costs for each item was observed. The variation was small for an organization with homogeneous input costs, and it was large for a multi-product organization. The overall savings in the inventory holding cost due to adjusting the inventory policies through this methodology was found to be about 3%, which is significant for a big organization. This analysis will affect the decision the determining inventory carrying cost, inventory policies (e.g., stocking levels), and pricing policies (e.g., quantity discounts) for retail organizations.

Kolahi-Randji, Attari, MYN, and Ala (2023) investigated the performance of multi-level and multi-commodity supply chains using a simulation approach. According to the study, Reducing holding costs in today's global economy, effects on SSI performance. Effective supply chain management is crucial for business success. The repercussions of a business strategy on the entire supply chain remain uncertain until it is implemented. Utilizing simulations offers the opportunity to gauge performance before implementing the strategy. The primary aim of employing supply chain simulation is to analyze the effects of different strategies on profit enhancement and cost reduction across all supply chain tiers. This research paper has formulated a discrete event simulation model using Arena software to evaluate and enhance the operational efficiency of the detergent supply chain. The problem involves multiple levels and commodities, encompassing four manufacturers, two intermediate storage warehouses, and four main distributors following an inventory control approach. Shortages are permitted, leading to a partial loss or back-ordering of products. The overarching objective is to minimize the overall inventory costs within the system, accounting for holding costs at each tier, managing shortages, and the expense incurred due to lost sales. A range of scenarios are developed to set control parameters, with the evaluation of supply chain performance falling into two main categories: financial and operational considerations. However, the study did not examine the effect of reducing holdings cost on the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSI) in Rukiga District. This study will address this issue.

Tulli (2023) conducted a study called Warehouse Layout Optimization: Techniques for Improved Order Fulfillment Efficiency. This paper examines the key strategies for designing warehouse layouts that maximize space utilization, reduce order picking time, and improve overall operational performance in Small-Scale Industries (SSIs). Efficient warehouse layouts are critical for streamlining the flow of goods from reception to storage and, ultimately, shipping. The paper investigates various layout designs, including grid, serpentine, and U-shaped configurations, and assesses their effectiveness in reducing travel time, minimizing bottlenecks, and increasing throughput. The role of technology, such as automation, robotics, and real-time data analytics, in optimizing warehouse operations is also discussed. The study also looks at how layout design can be adjusted to accommodate different types of inventories, such as high-demand and low-turnover products, as well as how seasonal fluctuations in order volume affect warehouse operations. By examining case studies of successful warehouse optimizations, this paper emphasizes the importance of tailoring warehouse layouts to the needs of the small-scale industries and its fulfillment processes. Finally, the paper demonstrates how strategic warehouse design improves operational efficiency while also increasing customer satisfaction through faster, more accurate order fulfillment.

Bolaños-Zúñiga & Vidal-Holguín, (2021) conducted a study on. The impact of inventory holding costs on the strategic design of supply chains. The explicit consideration of inventory holding costs for the strategic design of supply chains has not been sufficiently addressed in scientific literature. A possible cause is that usually supply chain optimization models are deterministic and linear or mixed-integer linear, while forecasting methods and inventory control systems are stochastic and non-linear. It is clear, however, that inventory costs might have a significant impact on optimal supply chain configuration and on distribution systems

expansion or contraction. This article presents a practical strategy that considers an item-by-item inventory control system by means of a Monte Carlo simulation model as a starting point to include inventory holding costs in a supply chain optimization model. Three strategies to include inventory costs in the objective function were analyzed: The Square Root Law (SRL), the potential functions that relate average inventory with warehouse throughput, and the estimation of average inventories by simulation. The results suggest that the SRL should not be used unless unusual assumptions hold and that potential functions are a very good approximation to consider inventory costs for supply chain configuration among small scale industries.

2.3.2. Minimizing waste on the performance of Small Scale Industries

Razi, Roslly, & Jurimi, (2022) conducted a study on Why does waste Separation at Source Initiative (SSI) did not fully commission in Malaysia? This qualitative research attempted to explore why the Separation at Source Initiative (SSI) did not fully commission in Malaysia. A content analysis approach was conducted to explore the obstacles and challenges of the citizen's participation in the SSI program in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Five individuals participated in this pilot study where data was collected using in-depth interviews. Several open-ended and probing questions were asked to elicit responses and experiences from the participants. Data collected was then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, where units of meaning were identified from the participants' responses. Creation of initial codes and categories were then developed and several themes had emerged from the data analysis process. Findings revealed that lack of enforcement, facilities, awareness and incentives as some of the barriers for participating in the SSI. Suggestions for better participation in Small-Scale Industries (SSI) were also proposed to the rightful stakeholders in ensuring successful implementation of the program.

Khare, Raghuvanshi, & Vashisht, (2023) conducted a study on the importance of green management and its implication in creating sustainability performance on the small-scale industries in India. This paper examines how stakeholder demand, organisational resources, knowledge, environmental uncertainty management, and product uniqueness affect green marketing and India's small-scale industry's sustainability. The study is important in green management because it examines concurrent relationships between stakeholders' demand, organisations' resources, knowledge, environmental uncertainty management, product uniqueness, and sustainability performance. Sustainability performance variables measure financial and non-financial performance in this study. This study quantitatively explained the phenomenon using numerical data and linear equation methods. Madhya Pradesh, with 7.54 percent of India's Small-Scale Industries (SSIs), hosted the study. Madhya Pradesh's forest-based industry and environmentally friendly development made these sites ideal. Researchers chose large cities since Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) were more prevalent there in prior years. Bhopal, Jabalpur, and Gwalior will contribute data. The findings revealed that, green management affects Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) sustainability performance due to stakeholder demand, knowledge, environmental uncertainty management, and product uniqueness, but not organisational resources. The study concluded that, Stakeholder demand, organisation resources, expertise, managing environmental uncertainty, and product uniqueness affect green management and Small-Scale Industries (SSI's) sustainability performance. Green management boosts Small-Scale Industries (SSI's) sustainability. This study was conducted in India not in Rukiga District Uganda.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design employing a mixed-methods approach to understand the research problem. A cross-sectional survey is a design that collects data to make inferences about a population of interest at one point in time (Shoma, 2019). Under the quantitative approach, the study used both descriptive and correlational designs to examine the effects of reducing holding costs, minimizing waste, and improving efficiency on Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance. A descriptive survey design employed structured questionnaires to describe the actual status of the phenomena under study (Sallah & Caesar, 2020), while the correlational design established relationships between variables (Sallah & Caesar, 2020). Under the qualitative approach, the study collected in-depth information about the study variables to provide a clear understanding of Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance in Rukiga District. These approaches enabled the researcher to gather and analyze relevant information concerning respondents' opinions on the two variables under study.

3.2 Area and Population of Study

Population refers to the complete set of elements (people, organizations, objects, events, etc.) that share common characteristics defined by the criteria of a research study, while the target population consists of the specific group of respondents employed as subjects for analysis (Fabian & Okpanaki, 2022). The study population included 25 agro-processing units (e.g., maize mills, banana

wine processors), 34 small-scale manufacturers (e.g., carpentry, metal works, crafts), 120 retail and wholesale traders, and 30 service-oriented Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) that handled physical stock (e.g., spare parts shops) in Rukiga District. To extract the sample for the research, the total number of respondents was subjected to the sample size estimation model developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

3.3 Sample Size Selection

A sample is a subset of the population’s constituent elements (Siba, 2019). The study included 28 small-scale manufacturers (e.g., carpentry, metal works, crafts), 142 retail and wholesale traders, and 30 service-oriented Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) that handled physical stock (e.g., spare parts shops), resulting in a total of 194 respondents who participated in the study.

Table 1: Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

No	Category	Accessible Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
1	Small-scale manufacturers (24	24	Purposive sampling
2	Retail and wholesale trader	142	103	Simple random sampling
3	Service-oriented SSIs that handle physical stock	28	24	Simple random sampling
	Total	194	151	

Adopted from Rukiga District modified by these researcher 2025

Note: Krejcie, & Morgan, (1970): www.kempro.org (2012) for sample size determinization. It is said that, there is no need of using the formula since the table of determining sample size has all the provisions the researcher requires to arrive at the sample size.

3.4 Data Analysis

According to Schrepp (2020), data analysis is the systematic application of statistical and logical techniques to describe, summarize, and compare data.

3.4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

The researcher organized all qualitative data collected from interviews with key informants and document analysis, coded the data, and generated key themes to build an understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3.4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis involved computing frequencies, means, and percentages to understand respondents’ perceptions of the effect of inventory management practices on Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance in Rukiga District. Correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson’s coefficient to determine the direction and strength of relationships between variables, with significance tested at 99% and 95% confidence levels (two-tailed) and a significance threshold of 0.05. A positive correlation indicated a direct relationship, while a negative correlation indicated an inverse relationship. Regression analysis used adjusted R² values and significance levels to determine the magnitude of influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable (Amin, 2005).

4.0 Discussion and Analysis of the results

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of Inventory management practices and performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District. The conclusions on the respondents' demographic characteristics are presented before the analysis and presentation of study’s findings.

4.1.1. Age of respondents

Age-related categories were used to group respondents. The distribution of respondents by age is shown in the frequency table (table 4.1).

Table 4. 1: Age of respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 21-30	25	21.7
31-40	40	34.7
41&above	50	43.6
Total	115	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The results in Table 4.1 show that the majority of respondents (43.6%) were aged 41 years and above, followed by those aged 31–40 years (34.7%), while the smallest group comprised respondents aged 21–30 years (21.7%). This distribution suggests that most participants involved in the study were mature adults with considerable work experience.

In relation to the study on inventory management practices and the performance of small-scale industries in Rukiga District, this age composition is significant because older respondents are more likely to possess practical knowledge and long-term exposure to inventory handling, stock control, and procurement procedures within their enterprises. Their experience provides valuable insights into how inventory management practices influence operational efficiency and overall business performance. Conversely, the inclusion of younger respondents contributes perspectives from a more innovative and technology-oriented generation, offering a balanced understanding of traditional and modern inventory management approaches among small-scale industries in the district.

4.1.2. Gender of respondents

Table 4. 2: Showing gender of respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Female	49	42.6
Male	66	57.4
Total	115	100.0

Source: Field data 2025

Table 4.2 presents the gender distribution of respondents, indicating that 57.4% were male while 42.6% were female. This finding suggests that male respondents dominated the study sample. In relation to the study on inventory management practices and the performance of small-scale industries in Rukiga District, this gender distribution reflects the broader trend in Uganda’s small-scale industrial sector, where men are more frequently engaged in ownership and management roles, particularly in manufacturing, construction, and mechanical-related enterprises. However, the notable participation of female respondents (42.6%) also demonstrates the growing involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities within the district. This gender composition is important for understanding variations in inventory management approaches, as male and female entrepreneurs may differ in their decision-making styles, risk tolerance, and resource utilization all of which can influence the performance of small-scale industries.

4.3 Correlation Analysis about inventory management practices and Performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs)

Correlation Coefficient was utilized to measure the degree and direction of association between the variables under investigation. This approach enabled the researcher to establish whether statistically significant relationships existed and to assess the extent to which variations in the independent variable explained changes in the dependent variable.

Table 4. 4.3: Correlation analysis for reducing holding costs

	Performance of SSI	Reducing holding costs

Performance of SSI	Pearson	1	.762**
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	115	115
Reducing holding costs	Pearson		1
	Correlation	.762**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	115	115

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary Data 2025

The results indicate that the Pearson correlation coefficient between the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSI) and reducing holding costs is 0.762, with a significance value (p) of 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 level of significance. This implies a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables. In other words, improvements in reducing holding costs are associated with corresponding improvements in the performance of small-scale industries.

The high positive correlation suggests that when small-scale industries effectively minimize holding costs such as storage, depreciation, and obsolescence costs they are likely to enhance their operational efficiency and profitability. The significance level further confirms that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance, thus supporting the reliability and validity of the results. The sample size of 115 respondents provides adequate statistical power for the analysis and strengthens the confidence in the findings.

The main purpose of this study was to assess the effect of cost management practices on the performance of small-scale industries. Specifically, it aimed to determine whether reducing holding costs significantly influences Small-Scale Industries (SSI) performance. The findings reveal that reducing holding costs positively and significantly affects the performance of small-scale industries. This means that enterprises that adopt effective inventory management strategies, such as minimizing overstocking and optimizing storage systems, experience better financial and operational outcomes.

These findings are consistent with cost management and operational efficiency theories, which assert that effective cost control mechanisms enhance productivity, profitability, and sustainability. By reducing holding costs, Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) can free up working capital, reduce wastage, and improve liquidity factors that directly contribute to higher performance levels.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between reducing holding costs and the performance of small-scale industries ($r = 0.762$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that holding cost reduction is a critical determinant of performance among Small-Scale Industries (SSIs). Consequently, managers should prioritize cost optimization strategies within their inventory and supply chain systems to enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

Based on the findings and relationships between the study variables the conclusions were made as shown below:

- Reducing inventory holding costs significantly improves the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District. Efficient management of storage, procurement, and stock levels enhances profitability, cash flow, and operational efficiency. SSIs that adopt modern inventory practices—such as accurate forecasting and just-in-time systems—perform better than those using traditional methods. Overall, minimizing holding costs strengthens competitiveness and sustainability among Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in the district.
- Improving efficiency has a significant positive effect on the performance of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District. Enhanced efficiency leads to increased productivity, reduced operational costs, and better utilization of resources. By adopting modern management practices and process optimization techniques, Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) can achieve

higher output levels, improved product quality, and greater customer satisfaction. Overall, improving efficiency strengthens competitiveness, profitability, and the long-term sustainability of Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in the district.

Recommendations

- Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District should adopt efficient inventory systems like Economic Order Quantity and Just In Time to cut excess stock, optimize warehouse space to reduce waste, and improve forecasting and procurement planning to align inventory with demand. These measures will lower holding costs, enhance cash flow, and boost overall performance.
- Minimizing waste in Small-Scale Industries (SSIs) in Rukiga District can enhance productivity, reduce operational costs, and improve profitability through the adoption of lean production practices, recycling and reuse of materials, staff training, investment in waste-reducing technologies, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of waste management strategies.

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