Strategic Priorities, Management Competencies, and Performance of the Divisions of Schools in Negros Island, Philippines

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ABSTRACT. Good governance is a requisite for achieving quality education and lifelong learning. This combined descriptive, comparative, and correlative study looked into the strategic priorities, management competencies, and performance of the 16 divisions of schools in the Department of Education in Negros Island, Philippines. The statistical tools used were percentage and mean to determine their strategic priorities, management competencies, and performance based on the study's indicators; single-factor analysis of variance to find out any significant difference in their strategic priorities and management competencies; and Spearman rho to examine the coefficient of correlation between their strategic priorities and management competencies, their strategic priorities and performance, and their management competencies and performance. The study found no significant difference between the divisions of schools' strategic priorities and management competencies, and no significant relationship between these variables and between these variables and their performance.

1.0. Introduction

Good governance is indispensable to making changes happen in governments and organizations worldwide. It is a system by which organizations are directed and controlled (Burns et al., 2016). In education, effective governance is a crucial component in promoting high performance, while poor governance causes many of the system's issues (Kadir & Nimota, 2019). The need for efficiency and effectiveness through the delivery of tangible results is increasing. Hence, useful and useable results-based monitoring and evaluation (M & E) systems are imperative (Kusek & Rist, 2004), as these can be a powerful management tool to measure and evaluate outcomes, help build and foster a solid knowledge base, gain political and financial support for policies, programs, and projects for effective governance and decision making, and produce major improvements (Chaplowe & Cousins, 2015).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals seeks that, by 2030, all United Nations Member States in 2015 share a common blueprint for people, planet, and prosperity by providing inclusive and equitable quality education for all levels in order to pride children and youth with a nurturing environment (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2021). However, the Global Monitoring Report showed that the world has not yet achieved Education for All, despite the many initiatives of governments, civil society, and the international community. The enormous progress throughout the globe since 2000 is still not enough to achieve such a goal (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). The Incheon Declaration 2030 made it known that, in the Philippines, progress made has been made toward meeting the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but much remains to be achieved to ensure quality education and lifelong learning for all (UNESCO, 2016).

Numerous studies have been conducted to look into the root cause of the often-repeated conclusion that the Philippine educational system is in crisis (Luz, 2008). It has become common knowledge that most Filipino graduates are not sufficiently prepared for the world of work because of a lack of access to education and the poor quality of education they received. Patrinos and LaRocque (2007) stressed that there is a need to improve education sector governance as the Philippine government continues to face significant challenges in getting more children enrolled in school while simultaneously ensuring that learning outcomes improve and respond positively to their needs by implementing programs and policies that emphasize accountability for results. The Social Weather Stations (SWS) (2006) on the Baseline Survey on Governance Reform indicated that much work needed to be done in streamlining

government and improving effectiveness and efficiency in governance and service provision. Macasaet (2002) recommended governance reform in basic education, particularly the development of education plans for the division according to local needs and monitoring implementation of division education plans according to agreed performance indicators.

Consistent and aligned with the Civil Service Commission's performance evaluation and appraisal system, the Strategic Performance Management System (SPMS), the Department of Education provides for the establishment and implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) in all DepEd schools and offices, with its mandate, vision, and mission at its core (Department of Education [DepEd], 2015). It stipulates the strategies, methods, tools, and rewards for performance target setting, monitoring, evaluation, and development planning. The order was out for dissemination on February 6, 2015; the rollout/implementation at the school level started in April 2014; the formal start of implementation of RPMS in DepEd started in 2015.

This baseline study looked into the strategic priorities and management competencies of the 16 large, medium, and small divisions of schools of DepEd in Negros Island during its start of implementation of the RPMS in 2015 and how their respective strategic plans as reflected in their OPCRFs, were implemented in the respective divisions of schools. It also explored how these strategic priorities and management competencies were translated into the divisions of schools' performance as evidenced by their respective data on enrolment, cohort survival, dropout, completion, National Achievement Test (NAT) results, and Alternative Learning System (ALS) completers in order to maximize favorable results, correct unintended consequences, and provide baseline data for future assessment and evaluation of the RPMS. It is important to note that baseline data are essential in determining the level of impact after certain developments have occurred after years of implementation, so the findings of this study may be considered by DepEd as one of the basis in evaluating its implementation of the RPMS and establishing further impacts or expectations in monitoring as it continues its implementation of the RPMS for the organization to achieve its goal of ensuring quality education and lifelong learning for all.

2.0. Framework of the Study

The overarching theoretical basis of this study is the same theoretical basis as the Civil Service Commission when formulating its latest evaluation and performance appraisal tool, the Strategic Performance Management System (SPMS), which is the Management by Objectives (MBO) Approach of Drucker (Drucker, 2012). Drucker's MBO is a strategic management approach that allows all members of an organization to contribute to achieving organizational goals. These goals are formulated and communicated by the management to all other members of the organization to achieve high performance. Employees are more likely to do their tasks if they are made part of goal setting and decide what they can do to contribute to achieving the organization's goals. For this reason, in Drucker's MBO approach, monitoring and evaluating every employee's performance and progress based on established objectives is a crucial step (Civil Service Commission [CSC], n.d.; DepEd, 2015).

Moreover, Mintzberg and Quinn's Model of Change considered size, with age, as the most important factor as formalized behaviors are practiced in more stable and larger organizations (Juneja, 2015). They have more complex structures that reflect their age, while smaller organizations with smaller structures tend to spend less time creating formal traditions and practices. As a result, young organizations adapt to and tolerate change. On the other hand, older organizations with formal structures and well-established traditions and practices, have a harder time adapting to change and are less flexible in their approach. Larger firms have a higher hierarchy, requiring more supervision and control over employee actions.

3.0. Methods

Research design. This present study used a combined descriptive, comparative, and correlative design to give an overall picture of the divisions of schools in Negros Island in terms of strategic priorities, management competencies, and performance. A complete enumeration was done to include all of its 16 divisions of schools in this study. There were no inclusion or exclusion criteria set to be part of the study, except that it would cover the entire Negros Island. Hence, it was only found during the conduct of the study that out of the 16 schools division offices, two are categorized as large, 12 are categorized as a medium, and two are categorized as small divisions of schools, and so size is considered a limitation of the study.

Negros Island, the context of the study, is the fourth largest island of the Philippines, with a land area of 13,309.60 km². It is one of the many islands that comprise the Visayas in the central part of the country. It is composed of two provinces, Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental. Negros Occidental, with its capital - Bacolod City, has 10 DepEd divisions of schools' offices including Negros Occidental Division: Kabankalan City Division, La Carlota City Division, Bago City Division, Bacolod City Division, Silay City Division, Cadiz City Division, Sagay City Division, Escalante City Division and San Carlos City Division. Negros Oriental, with its capital - Dumaguete City, on the other hand, has six division of schools' offices, including Negros Oriental Division: Bayawan City Division, Dumaguete City Division, Bais City Division, Tanjay City Division, and Guihulngan City Division (Bueza, 2015).

Sources of data and research instrument. The secondary data used in this study was gathered from the 16 schools' division offices. The data on percentage ratings of strategic priorities were solely based on what was considered by the 16 respective schools' division superintendents in the formulation of their 2015 Office Performance and Commitment Review Form (OPCRF), while management competencies were the percentage ratings of the core behavioral competencies and the leadership competencies of the 16 schools' division superintendents as indicated and rated in Parts II and III, respectively, of their office OPCRFs or their Behavioral Competency Scale Rating and Performance Contract Rating as reflected in their Career Executive Service Performance Evaluation System (CESPES) for 2015. It is important to note that the OPCRF is the form that shall reflect the office plans and commitments and shall be aligned with the overall organizational outcomes. It is accomplished by the head of the office, the schools' division superintendents, and is equivalent to their IPCRF. The OPCRFs, however, already consider and reflect the individual commitments and performance of all the employees of each of the 16 schools' division offices. It is also important to note that those schools' division superintendents whose behavioral competency and performance contracts were rated using CESPES are the superintendents who are career executive service eligible (CESEs) or career executive service officers (CESOs).

The SDSs' developmental needs were reflected on in Part IV of their 2015 OPCRFs, the part where they could reflect those competencies that they did not consistently demonstrate, those areas where they still had opportunities for improvement, or those aspects where they could still perform better to meet the expectations (DepEd, 2015). In this particular context, not all 16 SDSs, who were the ratees, accomplished this part. There were no more areas specified for improvement, implying that they have performed beyond expectations and have achieved the goals and objectives set for 2015, the start of the implementation of the RPMS.

The divisions of schools' performance were based on the following performance indicators for the school year 2014-2015: completion rate, cohort survival rate, dropout rate, enrolment rate, National Achievement Test or NAT results, and Alternative Learning System or ALS completers. The data sets were secondary in nature since they were but part of the divisions of schools' files or the DepEd Central Office electronic database, the Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EBEIS), which maintains a database of education statistics, sector performance indicators, and profile of public and private basic education schools. The overall rating or assessment rating of the strategic priorities and management competencies of each division of schools is evaluated based on the guidebook of SPMS implementation of the Civil Service Commission as mentioned under the framework of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure. A letter request for endorsement to be allowed to conduct the study with the 16 schools' division superintendents as respondents, make use of the 16 schools' division superintendents' (SDS's) Office Performance and Commitment Review Forms (OPCRFs) in 2015 and request the chief planning officers and Alternative Learning System (ALS) specialists of the different divisions of schools to accomplish the researcher-designed template containing the consolidated data of the divisions of schools profile and performance was submitted to the Regional Director for approval.

When approved, a preliminary visit was conducted to all 16 divisions of schools to meet all the schools' division superintendents and to distribute copies of the endorsement letter from the regional director, the research informed consent form to the SDSs, and the researcher-designed template for the division profile and performance to the division planning officers and ALS specialists. Contact numbers and email addresses of contact persons were secured for follow-up and validation purposes. Visits were conducted to the Department of Education Regional Office to retrieve data submitted through the Human Resource Division Coordinator. Those in charge of the data were allowed to submit partial data through email until all needed data were completed. Lastly, a letter

was also written to request the Career Executive Service Board (CES Board) to provide copies of the CESPES ratings of SDSs who are CESEs or CESOs. The data collection was made possible because the SDSs themselves gave copies of their CESPES, although there were those who relayed their final rating verbally or through another superintendent who tried to help by requesting those who had not submitted to give their ratings during one of their training sessions. Further visits were made to the different divisions of schools and the Regional Office, and a series of follow-up phone calls and emails were sent until the needed data had been gathered and completed.

The names of the schools' division superintendents and the investigator were kept confidential throughout the study and even in the report writing of the findings of the study. All of the divisions of schools, through their respective schools' division superintendents, participated until the study was completed, despite the fact that they had the right to be excluded or to quit during the duration of data gathering as explained during the briefing when the purpose and how the study was to be conducted were discussed to them. A copy of the final report of the study was given to the regional director and another copy to one of the schools' division superintendents.

Data analysis procedure. Identifying the statistical tools employed was based on the level of measurement of the data analyzed. Percentage and mean were used to determine their strategic priorities, management competencies, and performance in the aspects of enrolment, cohort survival, dropout, completion, National Achievement Test (NAT) performance, and Alternative Learning System (ALS) graduates. Meanwhile, the one-way single-factor analysis of variance, or ANOVA was used to find out whether or not a significant difference in the strategic priorities and management competencies existed among them, while Spearman rho was used to ascertain the coefficient of correlation between their strategic priorities and management competencies, their strategic priorities and performance, as well as between their management competencies and performance.

4.0. Results

Strategic priorities. These are the yearly performance targets and accomplishments that need to be achieved, broken down into three major final outputs (MFOs): education policy services, basic education services, and regulatory and developmental services, and translated into individual key results areas (KRAs) and objectives. The following are the key result areas: for education policy services – implementation of school agenda and policies; for basic education services – strategic planning, resource management, curriculum and instruction, human capital development, building partnership and networking, research and development, and monitoring and evaluation; and, for regulatory and developmental services – private school regulation. These KRAs are then used as the basis for objective setting in each division of schools. The rating scale ranges from 1 to 5, with adjectival ratings of 1.499 and below setting = *poor*; 1.500 to 2.499 = *unsatisfactory*; 2.500 to 3.499 = *satisfactory*; 3.500 to 4.499 = *very satisfactory*; and 4.500 to 5.000 = *outstanding* (CSC, n.d.). According to the data gathered, the strategic priorities of small divisions of schools were rated *outstanding,* while the medium and large divisions of schools were rated very *satisfactory.*

Moreover, the analysis of variance as summarized in Table 1 shows that the difference among the three groups of divisions of schools is not statistically significant, $F (2,13) = 2.78$, $p = 0.10$. The tabular value (or F crit) of 3.81, which is greater than the F computed of 2.78, and the p-value of 0.10, which is greater than the margin of error at 0.05, are indicators of such a condition among the three types of divisions of schools. Although differences exist among the mean ratings (4.82, 4.29, and 4.40), such difference have not reached a significant level.

Table 1. Strategic priorities of superintendents according to the size of the division of schools

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Small	2	9.64	4.82	0.02		
Medium	12	51.52	4.29	0.10		
Large	2	8.79	4.40	0.04		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	*SS*	df	*MS*	*F*	*p*-value	Fcrit
Between Groups	0.48	2	0.24	2.78	0.10	3.81
Within Groups	1.12	13	0.09			
Total	1.59	15				

DepEd, as an organization, formalizes or standardizes work processes and outputs. Small, medium, and large divisions of schools are equal in terms of strategic priorities. This shows that there is a programming of the content of work and procedures to be followed. Mintzberg considers this to be bureaucratic (Mintzberg, 1981), Fayol as being centralized by Raveendran (2021), and Bartelings et al. (2016) as "orchestrational" work.

Management competencies. The superintendents' core behavioral competencies include self-management, professionalism and ethics, results focus, teamwork, service orientation, and innovation, and leadership competencies that include leading people, performance management, and people development. The rating scale ranges from 1 to 5, with adjectival ratings of 1.499 and below = *rarely demonstrates*; 1.500 to 2.499 = *sometimes demonstrates*; 2.500 to 3.499 = *most of the time demonstrates*; 3.500 to 4.499 = *consistently demonstrates*; and 4.500 to 5.000 = role *model* (CSC, n.d.). The large divisions of schools serve as *role models*. In contrast, small and medium divisions of schools *consistently demonstrate* management competencies.

Also, as illustrated in Table 2, $F_{(3, 12)} = 0.84$ and $p = 0.45$ indicate that the difference in management competencies among the three groups of divisions of schools is not statistically significant. Although differences among the three mean ratings (4.10, 4.44, and 4.67) are evident, such differences fall below the cut-off. This goes to show that regardless of the size of the divisions of schools, the 16 schools' division superintendents are the same in terms of their management competencies.

Table 2. Management competencies of superintendents according to the size of the division of schools

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Small	2	8.19	4.10	5E-05		
Medium	12	53.26	4.44	0.23		
Large	2	9.34	4.67	0.11		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	*SS*	df	*MS*	*F*	*p*-value	*F* crit
Between Groups	0.34	2	0.17	0.84	0.45	3.81
Within Groups	2.63	13	0.20			
Total	2.97	15				

The homogeneity of the management competencies of the schools' division offices shows they have more or less acquired the same level of knowledge and developed the same level of mastery of the skills required for the job. According to Mintzberg (1981), it is the worker rather than the work or output being standardized in this situation. He calls this indoctrination, or that is responsive to ideological needs having internalized standards as deeply rooted beliefs. This finding is contrary to the finding of the study by Jaskyte (2013) that found the size to be a significant predictor of innovations, one of the management competencies.

Strategic priorities and management competencies. The results, summarized in Table 3, show that strategic priorities and management competencies are not related, $r_s=0.07$, $p =0.791$. In other words, one variable does not influence the other. Specifically, having high ratings in strategic priorities does not necessarily translate into high management competencies or vice versa. The *p*-value greater than the margin of error at 0.05 indicates that the 0.07 extent of the relationship between strategic priorities and management competencies is insufficient to make the two variables

Table 3. Strategic priorities and management competencies of schools' division superintendents

Variables	r_s value	p
Strategic priorities and management competencies	0.07	0.791

significantly related. Hence, there is no significant relationship between the strategic priorities and the management competencies among the 16 schools' division superintendents.

DepEd, as a large organization, has formalized the behavior of its people. Their works are well-coordinated, and they practice standardization of behavior. Certain authors highlighted the following, though in consonance with this finding: Lunenberg (2012) on the importance of awareness of the possible drawbacks in strategic goal setting for this may set blinders to hide potential danger and allow 'group think'; Thanomwan and Dhatthakan (2014) on competencies to be more personal that should be regularly sharpened; and Rehor (2015) on certain components in strategic plans that may be missed, which may hinder making well-informed strategic plans.

This finding, however, contradicts Bagheri (2016)'s findings, which state that human resource planning is an element of strategic planning, implying that strategic priorities are linked to managerial skills or vice versa; Lara et al. (2020)'s definition of management competency as having traits that are causally related to effective or superior performance, as well as observable behavior that contributes to success in a specific task or function; Akilli et al. (2014), who discovered a link between perceived academic leadership style and support for strategic planning; Kotler (2002), who emphasized the importance of developing strategic leaders who can visualize the future and implement strategic plans; and, Deeboonmee and Ariratana (2014), who posited in their study the importance of developing strategic leaders who can visualize the future and implement strategic plans.

Strategic priorities and divisions of schools' performance. The aggregate mean of the six performance indicators of the 16 divisions of schools is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of performance indicators according to the size of the divisions of schools

Performance Indicator	Small	Medium	Large	Aggregate Mean
Enrollment Rate	81.71	74.96	90.86	82.51
Cohort Survival Rate	86.86	84.71	84.83	85.47
Dropout Rate	2.05	1.87	2.35	2.09
Completion Rate	84.52	77.32	84.83	82.23
NAT Results	64.67	62.30	63.68	63.55
ALS Completers	15.30	13.38	13.39	14.02

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, the *outstanding* and *very satisfactory* strategic priorities of the divisions of schools are not significantly related to any of the indicators of performance used in the study. This indicates that the extent of ratings assigned to strategic priorities does not correspond to the level of performance to be achieved. Specifically, ratings given to strategic priorities at the onset of a particular term are not predictive of the aspired results or performance.

Table 5. Strategic priorities and divisions of schools' performance

Variables	rs	p
Strategic priorities and division of schools' enrolment rate	0.10	0.70
Strategic priorities and division of schools' cohort survival rate	-0.35	0.18
Strategic priorities and division of schools' dropout rate	0.06	0.82
Strategic priorities and division of schools' completion rate	-0.02	0.94
Strategic priorities and division of schools' NAT results	-0.20	0.45
Strategic priorities and division of schools' ALS completers	0.45	0.08
Overall	0. 39	0. 14

This signifies giving importance to how the strategic plan is being executed or implemented. The quality of the implementation of the plan should not be taken lightly since this serves as the connecting link between the two ends of the entire process, the objectives, and the results. Prevailing circumstances between the two variables is exemplified by the overall *p*-value of 0.14, which is greater

than the margin of error at 0.05, indicating no significant relationship between strategic priorities and divisions of schools' performance.

Drucker's (2012) MBO Approach suggests a positive correlation between strategic priorities and performance. It posited that strategic plans define where the organization is heading and how it will get there. Poor planning can negatively affect an organization's performance or be a major cause of failure. Kumar (2015) added that the strategic planning process could improve outcomes and help avoid taking on risks due to a lack of foresight.

Management competencies and divisions of schools' performance. Table 6 shows that the schools' division superintendents' ratings in management competencies that are either at the *role model* or *consistently demonstrate*s level are not significantly related to any of the indicators of the divisions of schools' performance. This indicates that the extent of ratings assigned to the management competencies does not correspond to the level of performance to be achieved. The overall *p*-value of 0.45, which is greater than the margin of error, elucidates that the ratings assigned to the competencies referred to are not reflective of the authentic competencies possessed by the school administrators concerned.

In the context of education, a study conducted by Latorre-Medina and Blanco- Encomienda (2013) recommended that a new management model be based on significant decision-making capacity, and leadership that is not solely focused on one single leader but shared across the organization. To attain quality education, collaboration and continuous adherence to the standards are necessary (Banusing & Bual, 2021; Bual & Madrigal, 2018; Madrigal & Oracion, 2019).

Table 6. Management competencies and divisions of schools' performance

Variables	rs	p
Management competencies and division of schools' enrolment rate	-0.18	0.50
Management competencies and division of schools' cohort survival rate	0.03	0.92
Management competencies and division of schools' dropout rate	-0.09	0.75
Management competencies and division of schools' completion rate	-0.38	0.15
Management competencies and division of schools' NAT results	0.10	0.71
Management competencies and division of schools ALS completers	-0.18	0.50
Overall	-0.21	0.45

Further, Bitterova et al. (2014) concluded in their study that the quality of school leaders is one of the basic factors that influence the quality of teaching and learning processes, which vary significantly at each level of the system of education. Katz (2009), in his article, "Skills of an Effective Administrator," and Zenger and Folkman (2014), in their article, "The Skills Leaders Need at Every Level," elaborated their point by saying administrators should act in a way that advances the welfare of the entire organization. The success of any organization depends on the conceptual skill of its executives. They emphasized that competency should be manifested in performance, not merely in potential.

5.0. Conclusion

The small, medium, and large divisions of schools are equal in terms of strategic priorities. Size does not matter in formulating their strategic priorities. Instead of considering the significance of the context of the divisions of schools, more emphasis has been given to ensuring that their plans are aligned with the goals of the higher levels of the hierarchy, or target setting may have been given more emphasis compared to operational issues as generators of success. Based on the results, this study reiterates the recommendation of the study conducted by Macasaet (2002) that, as part of governance reform in basic education, the plans of the divisions of schools must be according to local needs and available resources, and that innovative projects must be undertaken based on these needs so that results can be interpreted and portrayed as plans translated into action.

Just like the homogeneity of strategic priorities, the 16 divisions of schools also demonstrated homogeneity in terms of management competencies. This could be attributable to the standardization of the knowledge and skills of the 16 schools' division superintendents. Despite the high ratings of

management competencies among the schools' division superintendents, DepEd may still continue developing them as effective executives as part of the continuous improvement process while ensuring authentic competencies predictive of the aspired result or outcome. Size may also be looked at as one of the factors in the effective structuring of the organization despite its homogeneity.

The strategic priorities at the onset of the school year were not predictive of the aspired results or performance. The manner in which these are being formulated, implemented, and evaluated may be reviewed to ensure that they reflect local needs for improved performance. The performance results, with aggregate means ranging from 14.02% to 85.47%, could still have been improved. It is also worth noting that, in Part IV of the OPCRFs of the SDSs, there were those SDSs who did not indicate their developmental plans, implying that "Outstanding" ratings have already been achieved as indicated in the PRMS implementation guidelines. This is contrary to the continuous improvement approach and should not be taken lightly, especially that this study was conducted in the early stages of implementation of the RPMS. Also, a certain performance trend can be deduced based on the results, with either the two large or two small divisions of schools being the highest, while the 12 medium divisions of schools consistently being in the middle, which could be one of the effects of standardization or formalization. Also, the small divisions of schools had somehow demonstrated their being competitive, which needed to be supported and sustained. Withal, the giving of incentives and rewards corresponding to the ratings achieved may also be reviewed for this to serve its true purpose.

The management competencies of the schools' division superintendents did not correspond to the level of performance to be achieved. This may also be looked into to ensure organizational success. Authentic competencies are manifested in performance, not merely in potential. This should be given the utmost attention, or else it would become just a natural part of its normal operation, hence, would hinder the system from becoming more effective and more efficient in delivering inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners.

Lastly, this baseline study may be replicated by the organization involving the divisions of schools representing the 17 regions of the country in order to get a clearer picture of how PRMS is actually implemented in the Department of Education and to find out if this is serving its real purpose of enhancing performance to ensure quality education and lifelong learning for all.

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