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Describing Basic Education Quality Through School Governance and Students' Access to Educational Opportunities

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Abstract

The government of the Philippines has looked into some measures to improve high-quality education. In three school divisions in the country—Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City—a study described the quality of basic education through school governance and students access to educational opportunities. The findings revealed that the quality of basic education was not significantly correlated, even though students' access to educational opportunities was "high" and school governance was managed "to a very large extent." Conclusively, students

have equal and equitable possibilities to benefit fully from their education regardless of their socioeconomic situation. Similarly, activities carried out in schools are expertly executed by school heads and their constituents to provide the school with strategic direction to ensure that goals are attained and resources are used responsibly and with accountability. However, it may be necessary to identify additional variables contributing to the deterioration to improve the dismal state of basic education quality.

Keywords: Strategic Accountability, Educational Accessibility, Deterioration of Education Quality

Introduction

Everybody knows that knowledge is a pillar of the development of all nations globally. When one preaches education, he means typically quality education. An education can answer the problems an individual faces in the environment. Thus, the quest for quality education has become imperative in this modern world.

Slade (2017) ^[25] defined quality education as focusing on the child's social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. According to King (2013) ^[13], a quality education entails knowledge and abilities that may demonstrate achievement. Krause (2012) ^[14] argues that a quality education provides resources and guides policies to ensure that every child learns about leading a healthy lifestyle and arrives at school in excellent health. Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, and Crawford (2015) ^[24] pointed out that quality education outcomes are needed for prosperous individuals, communities, and societies. It enables schools to better align with, integrate into, and utilize resources from a wide range of sectors that support the educational development of their students.

In the Philippines, there are some measures that the government has looked into to reform quality education. The 10-year basic education has changed to the K to 12 curriculum. However, statistics shows that Filipino students consistently perform poorly on the National Achievement Test (NAT), highlighting the country's declining quality of education (Roces, 2019) ^[22]. The disparity in students' performance in the nationally administered test may be due to the types of access to educational opportunities that Filipino students have experienced in the new K to 12 curricula.

The term "access" usually refers to how educational institutions and policies guarantee that all students have equal and equitable access to their education (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014) ^[27]. It also refers to educational initiatives or policies aimed at removing institutional disincentives, obstacles, or roadblocks to academic success, whether deliberate or not, or providing kids with the resources, social assistance, and academic support they may require to succeed in school (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014) ^[27]. Schools must expand services or eliminate any actual or potential obstacles preventing some students from equally engaging in specific courses or academic programs to increase access. However, the link between students' access to education opportunities and the declining quality of education, which reflects the student's performance in the nationally administered test, has yet to be studied at large. Hence, it is timely that an investigation was set up to develop research-based support for the ongoing review of the K to 12 programs.

On the other hand, Abdullahi (2018) ^[1] pointed out that several factors are related to the poor quality of education. The

phenomenon highlights ineffective governance, which breeds several issues in the educational system and lowers the standard of instruction (Abdullahi, 2018) ^[1]. However, no evidence shows that the declining quality of education in the country is due to school governance.

Kadir (2019) ^[10] explained that school governance is responsible for effectiveness, quality, and accountability. Accordingly, good governance is a significant factor in improving the quality of education. It refers to the availability of resources, responsibility, and participatory decision-making. Khalique (2010) ^[12] stressed that good governance in education concerns how a school system composes policies, produces and expends funds, prepares teachers for teaching, implements the curricula, and leads the school population. Scott (2014) added that the effectiveness of school governance aims for school reform to result in the highest overall school performance. Essentially, Griffin and Ward (2006) advocated that effective school governance primarily improved the declining quality of education.

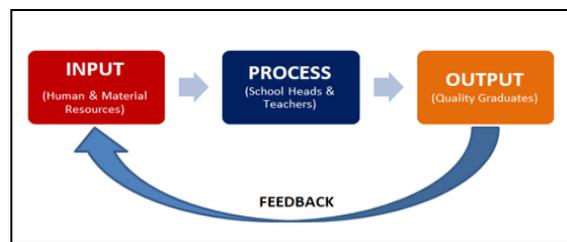
Unfortunately, the declining quality of Philippine education is still visible on the scale. The scenario is also evident in Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City. Hence, the researchers hypothesized that students' access to educational opportunities and school governance of school heads could affect the decline in the quality of education. Therefore, this study was conducted to prove the researchers' claim that access and governance are linking the deterioration of the quality of education to be viewed in the three (3) divisions of Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City. The researcher had a firm conviction that students' access to educational opportunities and school governance if found as the causes describing the decline of quality of education in the divisions covered in the study, could be a valuable contribution to the ongoing K-12 program assessment.

Theoretical framework

In the "Social System Theory," Parson claims that the system as a collection of components is unified to achieve overall specified goals and objectives (Abdullahi, 2018) ^[1], which served as the study's theoretical foundation. The theory explains that if one part of the system is missed or removed, the others are also changed. According to Abdullahi, the system focuses on the relations between the parts and how they work together. Further, a system has various inputs such as (raw materials, money, people, and technologies), processes (through planning, organizing, directing, motivating, coordinating, and controlling), and outputs (products, profits, satisfaction, and services) which are secured by transformation through the good governance of service providers and feedback about the quality of products. A system's desired state is achieved through feedback. There are two types of feedback. The first is negative feedback, in which the system reacts after the error has occurred. The second is called feed-forward control or positive feedback.

The cited theory can be used in the educational system because, as illustrated in Figure 1, a school is a system that also contains a variety of inputs that are processed to create outputs with feedback. School inputs on learning outcomes are parameters of an education production function (Das, Dercon, Habyarimana, Krishnan, Muralidharan, & Sundararaman, 2013) ^[7]. Every school system requires

money and other resources such as buildings, desks and chairs, textbooks, black or whiteboards, water, and electricity. These are among the education inputs that the school uses in its daily operation to function. Accordingly, education inputs are the tools a system of education uses to accomplish its goals.



Adopted from Abdullahi, 2018 ^[1]

Fig 1: Theoretical Framework of the Study

In most cases, the government supplies these inputs through the agency or a provider organization dedicated to education. Education service providers (school heads, teachers, and schools) roll out school inputs by transforming the available resources, especially the students, which become the school's output (Das *et al.*, 2013) ^[7]. In processing school inputs, good governance emerged to ensure that students access various educational opportunities. Information regarding feedback and environment concerns the school's outputs and external environment. In this case, the students' outputs manifest the quality of education.

The mentioned theory is closely connected to the present study since access and governance are seen as partners in realizing the quality of education. Kadir and Nimota (2019) ^[11] asserted that good governance ensures students' access to educational opportunities for quality education. Accordingly, good governance comprises the responsibilities of government (policymakers), education leaders, education service providers, students, parents, and stakeholders. Policymakers jointly determine the policies, goals, and funding for education. Education leaders are charged with achieving education goals and are held accountable for meeting the goals.

In this regard, education leaders then put the wheel of bureaucracy in motion to allocate the resources needed and implement the programs required to realize the stated educational goals and objectives. School heads and teachers process the inputs and are held accountable to parents, governing bodies, and the Department of Education. Therefore, the system theory supports this study because good governance that redounds to students' access to educational opportunities cannot be overemphasized in the effective management of secondary schools (Abdullahi, 2018) ^[1] as an open system linking toward the quality of education (Kadir & Nimota, 2019) ^[11].

Methods and materials

The study employed the survey and correlational methods of quantitative research design with a questionnaire checklist to generate the primary data. Secondary data were obtained from the divisions' databases to reflect the student's performance in the nationally administered test, which describes basic education quality. A survey was used to determine the level of students' access to educational opportunities and the extent of school governance. A

correlation was employed to assess the students' access to educational opportunities and school governance linking basic education quality in Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City divisions.

One hundred sixteen school heads (116), 232 teachers, and 232 students responded to the survey. The weighted mean of the level of students' access to educational opportunities was interpreted using the descriptions presented below:

Description 1

Scale	Range of Values	Description
4	3.26 – 4.00	Very High
3	2.51 – 3.25	High
2	1.76 – 2.50	Low
1	1.00 – 1.75	Very Low

Similarly, the weighted mean of the extent of school governance was interpreted employing the description shown below:

Description 2

Scale	Range of Values	Description
4	3.26 – 4.00	Very Large
3	2.51 – 3.25	Large
2	1.76 – 2.50	Small
1	1.00 – 1.75	Very Small

On the other hand, basic education quality was categorized based on the performance of the schools reflective of the students' National Achievement Test (NAT) performance for 2017, 2018, and 2019. The descriptive equivalent of NAT scores was as follows (Albano, 2019) [4]:

Description 3

Scale	Range of Values	Range of Scores	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	96 – 100	Mastered
4	3.40 – 4.20	86 – 95	Moving towards mastery
3	2.61 – 3.40	66 – 85	Average mastery
2	1.81 – 2.60	36 – 65	Low mastery
1	1.00 – 1.80	35 & below	Very low mastery

Standard deviation was also used to determine the degree of homogeneity and heterogeneity of the responses on the level of students' access to educational opportunities, the extent of school governance, and the basic education quality manifested by the NAT results where $SD < 3$ is homogenous and $SD \geq 3$ is heterogeneous (Aiken & Susane, 2001 [3]; Refugio, Galleto & Torres, 2019 [21]).

Moreover, linking school governance and students access to educational opportunities to basic education quality was determined using Spearman Rank-Order Correlation. The following guide in interpreting the value of ρ , suggested by Cohen, West, and Aiken (2014) [5] and also used by Refugio, Galleto, Bulado, Dimalig, Colina, Inoferio, and Nocete (2020) [20], was used.

Description 4

Value	Effect Size	Interpretation
± 0.50 to ± 1.00	Large	High positive/negative correlation
± 0.30 to ± 0.49	Medium	Moderate positive/negative correlation
± 0.10 to ± 0.29	Small	Low positive/negative correlation
± 0.01 to ± 0.09	Negligible	Slight positive/negative correlation
No correlation		

Results and discussion

Table 1: The Extent of School Governance

Indicators	School Heads			Teachers			Students		
	AWV	SD	Description	AWV	SD	Description	AWV	SD	Description
Teamwork	3.81	0.343	Very Large	3.81	0.341	Very Large	3.83	0.294	Very Large
Community Engagement	3.71	0.380	Very Large	3.70	0.360	Very Large	3.80	0.314	Very Large
Human Resource Development	3.79	0.375	Very Large	3.78	0.358	Very Large	3.64	0.443	Very Large
School/Physical Improvement	3.74	0.495	Very Large	3.66	0.516	Very Large	3.77	0.469	Very Large
School Management, Monitoring, and Evaluation	3.88	0.302	Very Large	3.88	0.256	Very Large	3.84	0.267	Very Large
School Mobilization and Networking	3.88	0.323	Very Large	3.86	.348	Very Large	3.88	0.276	Very Large
Planning and Research	3.92	0.229	Very Large	3.91	0.248	Very Large	3.91	0.250	Very Large
Overall Mean & SD	3.82	0.350	Very Large	3.80	0.347	Very Large	3.81	0.330	Very Large

AWV – Average Weighted Value, SD – Standard Deviation

Table 1 reveals that school heads claimed the level of teamwork in school governance "to a very large extent." Teachers and students supported the school heads' pronouncement. It means that school heads enormously exhausted teamwork in governing the school and can work with their colleagues, listen to suggestions, make collective decisions, and be team players. Don and Raman (2019) [8] contemplated that an aspect that should be emphasized in the strategic management of a school organization is forming a working team that is active and able to work together to achieve organizational goals. Also, Navarro, Bosch, Palacín, Solé, Berger, Leiva, and Castellano (2017) [17] stressed that teams are always designed to do something to accomplish some tasks.

Similarly, the school heads, teachers, and students unanimously declared "to a very large extent" the community engagement in school governance. It indicates that school heads and teachers participated in community

activities outside the school and among various school stakeholders. McAlister (2013) [15] posited that community participation is crucial for individual student achievement, catalyzing and sustaining school improvement, and building school cultures that support all students.

Presented in the table further, school heads, teachers, and students indicated "to a very large extent" the practice of school governance and human resource development. It means that school heads, as the leading implementers of school governance, possess the ability in partnership with the teachers to make a development plan for the growth of their students. Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2004) [18] emphasized that forward-looking management provides opportunities for human capital development in work economics. Accordingly, employees can be the best partners in any enterprise if they are maximally developed and reach their optimum potential.

Likewise, the school heads rated school/physical improvement "to a very large extent." Teachers and students also affirmed the school heads' rating. It follows that the schools in Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City ensure the development and progress of the school and their physical landscape generated, created, and enhanced by school heads and other service providers. Panotes (2015) [19] averred that well-maintained physical facilities are essential to enable people to maximize their potential to achieve goals and objectives.

In a similar vein, the table unveils that school heads exhausted school management, monitoring, and evaluation "to a very large extent." Teachers and students also affirmed the school heads' claim. The finding deduced that school heads employed a distinct planning, organizing, acting, and controlling process. They managed to oversee and check school activities, especially those undertaken by teachers, students, and external stakeholders, to ascertain whether they could achieve the planned results. The current result backed up the note of the World Bank (2016) [28], revealing that the key elements of an effective school-based management system were in place. However, schools reported that they still needed to implement this system's critical aspects. Parents and local communities still played a minimal role in decision-making and held schools accountable.

Furthermore, the table reflects that school heads indicated "to a very large extent" in enforcing school mobilization and networking. The teachers and students also supported the school heads' claim. The result infers that school heads subscribed to DepEd Order no. 40, s. 2015, stating that to meet the objectives of the K to 12 Program, all school divisions must form partnerships with various organizations in the areas of work-based learning opportunities for public school students, use of facilities and equipment, additional teacher training opportunities, and additional resources in the form of donations. It has been emphasized that the social mobilization and networking section of a division is accountable for providing technical support in strengthening

and sustaining relationships and collaboration of education partners and stakeholders, mobilizing resources, and providing technical assistance to support special programs and projects toward increasing access and enhancing quality basic education delivery.

Moreover, the table reflects that school governance in planning and research was "to a very large extent." The finding could mean that schools in the three divisions under investigation adhere to the principles needed to conduct basic education research: (1) build on gains from existing research; (2) generate new knowledge on less explored, but priority fields of basic education; (3) systematically focus DepEd's attention on relevant education issues; and (4) maximize available resources for research within and outside the school (DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2016). The current finding corroborated Cortes, Pineda, and Geverola (2021) [6] when they revealed that very few teachers regarded selecting an action research topic, planning the project, analyzing and presenting data, and integrating ethics as areas of non-difficulty. Likewise, Morales, Abulon, Soriano, David, Hermosissima, and Gerundio (2016) [16] reported that teachers perceived moderate difficulty conducting action research. The studies mentioned manifested that schools sufficiently educated teachers on conducting action research.

In general, school governance in Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City was governed "to a very large extent." It means school activities were skillfully exercised by school heads and their constituents to provide the school with strategic direction to ensure objectives are achieved and resources are used responsibly and with accountability. However, Saguin (2019) [23] asserted that education governance reforms would continue to struggle to be effective when procedural policy instruments need to articulate the policy goals. In conclusion, the importance of comprehensive school governance to emerge should be relevant for understanding education policy reforms and help develop a fuller understanding of the functioning of the education sector.

Table 2: Level of Students' Access to Education Opportunities

Items	School Heads			Teachers			Students		
	AWV	SD	Description	AWV	SD	Description	AWV	SD	Description
1. Access to assistive technologies, accommodations, or modified school facilities and transportation vehicles that make full participation in school programs possible for diverse groups of students.	2.57	0.497	High	2.60	0.490	High	1.36	0.480	Very Low
2. Access to equal opportunities in educational programs and activities regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation, including extracurricular activities and sports.	3.87	0.337	Very High	3.85	0.359	Very High	3.58	0.495	Very High
3. Access to adequate health care and nutritional services, including free or reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches to ensure that children living in poverty are not attending school sick or hungry.	1.87	0.337	Low	1.95	0.222	Low	1.54	0.500	Very Low
4. Access to adequate public transportation to attend schools that may or may not be located near student homes.	1.04	0.204	Very Low	1.05	0.222	Very Low	1.00	0.000	Very Low
5. Access to preschool or kindergarten so that students enter school prepared to learn and succeed academically regardless of income level or a family's ability to pay for early childhood education.	3.96	0.204	Very High	4.00	0.000	Very High	4.00	0.000	Very High
6. Access to intensive instruction in the English language or academic language for students who cannot read, write, or speak English.	2.47	0.501	Low	2.50	0.501	Low	1.52	0.664	Very Low
7. Access to interpreters and translated documents for non-English-speaking students, parents, and families, including multilingual translations of school policies, academic materials, parent communications, event announcements, website content,	2.01	0.786	Low	2.12	0.827	Low	1.24	0.426	Very Low
8. Access to counseling, social services, academic support, and	2.96	0.550	High	3.03	0.587	High	3.31	0.701	Very High

other resources that can help students who are at risk of failure or dropping out remain in school, succeed academically, graduate with a diploma, and pursue postsecondary education.									
9. Access to individualized education programs (IEPs) for special-education students.	1.17	0.379	Very Low	1.11	0.311	Very Low	2.69	0.731	High
10. Access to mainstream classrooms and academically challenging content through inclusion of various strategies.	3.40	0.491	Very High	3.40	0.491	Very High	3.56	0.497	Very High
11. Access to any trained professionals or specialized educational resources that may be needed to ensure that the needs of students are being met.	3.66	0.477	Very High	3.81	0.396	Very High	3.28	0.452	Very High
12. Access to advanced-level learning opportunities such as honor courses, Mathematics Saturday classes, or Advanced Placement courses.	2.83	0.379	High	2.84	0.363	High	2.82	0.812	High
13. Access to programs that historically required students to meet prerequisites before being allowed to enroll in a course or participate in a program.	1.39	0.489	Very Low	1.29	0.456	Very Low	2.95	0.846	High
14. Access to more challenging academic content, stronger preparation for postsecondary success, and college-level learning.	3.40	0.491	Very High	3.41	0.492	Very High	3.41	0.494	Very High
15. Access to technology, including high-speed internet connections and adequate hardware (computers, laptops, tablets) and software (particularly learning applications) so that students have equitable access to the same digital and online learning opportunities regardless of their family's income level or ability to pay for these technologies.	2.91	0.282	High	2.95	0.222	High	2.24	0.746	Low
Mean	2.63	0.152	High	2.66	0.118	High	2.57	0.140	High

AWV – Average Weighted Value, SD – Standard Deviation

Table 2 presents the level of students' access to educational opportunities. Students indicated that they had "very low" access to modified school facilities, accommodations, or assistive technology and vehicles that make full participation in school programs possible for diverse groups of students. They also indicated "very low" to prevent children living in poverty from going to school sick or hungry, access to basic health care and nutritional assistance, including free or reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches, is required. Likewise, they had "very low" access to adequate public transportation to attend school, possibly close to student residences, and "very low" access to intensive English or academic language instruction for students who cannot read, write, or speak English. Moreover, they had "very low" Access to interpreters. They translated academic texts, parent communications, event

notices, website content, and other documents for non-English speaking students, parents, and families. School heads and teachers supported the students' claim that they had "low and very low" access to the stated items.

In sum, school heads, teachers, and students across the three divisions of Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog City, and Dapitan City disclosed that students had "high" access to education opportunities, as those presented in the table. It means that students have equal and equitable opportunities regardless of their status in life to take full advantage of their education. However, increasing access necessitates schools to offer extra services or remove any actual or possible obstacles that can prohibit some students from equitable participation in particular courses or academic programs, claims the Glossary of Education Reform (2014) [27].

Table 3: Schools' Performance in the National Achievement Test

School Year	Frequencies					AWV	SD	Description
	96 – 100 (5)	86-95 (4)	66-85 (3)	36-65 (2)	35 & below (1)			
2017	-	-	82	24	10	2.62	0.641	Average
2018	-	-	79	29	8	2.61	0.615	Average
2019	-	-	76	25	15	2.53	0.716	Low
Overall	-	-	79	24	13	2.57	0.688	Low

Table 3 discloses that students' declining performance levels were viewed from average to low in 2017, 2018, and 2019, with overall NAT performance in the "low mastery level." The finding implies that the fall in the NAT scores may be attributable to the questions' wording, which is in keeping with the K–12 program's emphasis on developing 21st-century skills. Similarly, though the teachers hone students with the necessary skills and abilities needed in the 21st century, teachers, students, parents, and the entire school community must work collaboratively for the holistic development of the students. Galleto (2017) [9] posited that the pupils' performance and achievement are a collaborative effort among the school heads, teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders to ensure higher student performance.

Table 4: Relationship between the Students' Access to Educational Opportunities and the Basic Education Quality

Variables	ρ-value	p-value @0.05	Interpretation
Students' Access to Educational Opportunities and Basic Education Quality	-0.05	0.565	Negligible Slight Negative Correlation Not Significant

Table 4 shows that the relationship between students' access to educational opportunities and basic education quality was negligible and insignificant. It means that students' access to educational opportunities did not link to basic education quality. It implies that other factors may be associated with

the schools' declining performance in the NAT not covered in the study. The current result supported a lawmaker's observations in a hearing, which showed that the government provided students with educational opportunities (Aguinaldo, 2019)^[21]. However, the curriculum that is supposed to be taught under K to 12 needs to be taught better. The student cannot process the curriculum correctly, so schools register low National Achievement Test scores (Aguinaldo, 2019)^[22], reflecting poor basic education quality.

Table 5: Relationship between the School Governance and Basic Education Quality

Variables	ρ-value	p-value @0.05	Interpretation
School Governance and Basic Education Quality	-0.247	0.088	Small Low Negative Correlation Not Significant

Table 5 reveals that the relationship between school governance and basic education quality was small and not significant. It means that school governance did not link to the schools' declining performance in the NAT, reflecting poor basic education quality. It also reflects other unreported variables contributing to the schools' falling NAT performance. Tan Yan Kee Foundation, Inc. (2014)^[26] pointed out that absenteeism due to child labor and dropouts due to financial status are just a few reasons for the decline of the National Achievement Test.

Conclusions

All students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have equal and equitable possibilities to benefit fully from their education. In a similar spirit, school initiatives were expertly carried out by school heads and their associates to provide the school with strategic direction to ensure that goals are attained and resources are used responsibly and with accountability. On the other hand, the questions' framing following the K–12 program's emphasis on developing 21st–century abilities may be responsible for the decline in educational quality. Furthermore, the three study divisions' basic education quality is unaffected by school governance and students' access to educational options.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made following a careful analysis of the data and conclusions:

1. Schools in the divisions under survey, through the collaborative efforts of the Superintendents, school heads, teachers, and external school stakeholders, should provide additional services or remove any actual or potential impediments that may hinder some students from equitably participating in the program in specific courses or academic programs considering the increasing students' access to educational opportunities.
2. Superintendents, school heads, teachers, and external stakeholders should always consider the importance of comprehensive school governance to emerge relevant for understanding education policy reforms and help develop a fuller understanding of the functioning of the education sector in general.
3. Though the teachers hone students with the skills and abilities needed in the 21st century, teachers, students,

parents, and the entire school community have to work collaboratively for the holistic development of the students.

4. Since students' access to educational opportunities and school governance did not link to basic education quality, other factors may be identified in reviewing the K to 12 programs.

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