



DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS OF DEPED POLICIES: PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

This position paper examines the divergent interpretations of Department of Education (DepEd) orders and memorandums among school heads. While DepEd directives are intended to standardize practices and ensure equity, differences in interpretation often lead to inconsistencies in instructional supervision, curriculum implementation, and school management. These disparities weaken policy coherence and compromise the constitutional right to quality education. The paper argues that while autonomy allows school leaders to adapt policies to local contexts, excessive divergence undermines national goals. Grounded in the Philippine Constitution and Republic Act No. 9155, the discussion reframes the issue as a rights concern, emphasizing learners' entitlement to consistent and equitable education. Proposed solutions include policy simplification, capacity-building programs, collaborative dialogue, stronger monitoring and evaluation, and rights-based framing. By harmonizing interpretations, DepEd can strengthen accountability, uphold equity, and ensure that directives fulfill their intended purpose of advancing quality education nationwide.

KEYWORDS: *DepEd policies, School Heads, Policy Interpretation, Autonomy and Accountability, Rights-Based Framing, Republic Act No. 9155, Instructional Supervision, Equity in Education*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) serves as the central authority in shaping the direction of Philippine basic education through its issuance of orders and memorandums (DepEd, 2026). These official directives are designed to standardize practices across schools, ensuring that national policies are implemented with consistency, accountability, and equity (Ang et al., 2025). Ideally, they function as guiding instruments that align school operations with the broader goals of educational reform, such as improving instructional supervision, strengthening governance, and promoting inclusive learning environments. However, the reality in schools often reveals a different picture. School heads, as the primary implementers of these policies, interpret the directives in diverse ways sometimes rigidly adhering to compliance, other times flexibly adapting them to local contexts (Langeveldt, 2024). In fact, Bastea, Catalano and Dohotaru (2023), stated that this divergence in interpretation creates uneven practices across schools, raising questions about leadership effectiveness, policy clarity, and the coherence of the education system.

The issue of varied interpretations is not a mere administrative concern; it has profound implications for teachers, learners, and the overall success of reforms (Bongco & David, 2020). When school heads apply DepEd policies inconsistently, teachers may experience confusion in expectations, learners may face unequal access to opportunities, and reforms may lose their intended impact (Espeño, 2025). For instance, a memorandum on instructional supervision may be enforced as a strict evaluative

tool in one school, while in another it may be treated as a mentoring framework leading to different outcomes in teacher development and student learning. Such inconsistencies highlight the urgent need to examine how policies are communicated, understood, and operationalized at the school level. This paper argues that addressing divergent interpretations requires clearer legal framing, sustained professional development for school leaders, and collaborative dialogue to harmonize perspectives. Only through these measures can DepEd directives truly fulfill their purpose of advancing quality and equitable education across the nation.

II. ARGUMENT AND COUNTER-ARGUMENT

Divergent interpretations of DepEd orders and memorandums weaken policy coherence and create disparities in implementation across schools (EDCOM II, 2025). According to REDE Consulting LLC (2025), when directives are understood differently, the intended uniformity of practice is lost, resulting in fragmented governance. For instance, a DepEd order on instructional supervision may be enforced as a rigid evaluative checklist in one school, while another school head may treat it as a developmental mentoring tool. These contrasting approaches lead to unequal experiences for teachers some feeling pressured by compliance-driven supervision, while others benefit from supportive guidance. Similarly, curriculum adjustments may be implemented strictly in one district but flexibly in another, producing inconsistencies in student learning outcomes. Such disparities undermine the principle of equity in education, as



learners across schools are not afforded the same opportunities or standards. Ultimately, divergent interpretations dilute the impact of reforms, weaken accountability, and compromise the credibility of DepEd's policy framework.

On the other hand, diversity in interpretation can be seen as a strength, allowing school heads to exercise autonomy and adapt policies to their unique contexts (Bastida, & Gonzales, 2024). The Philippines is geographically and culturally diverse, with schools facing different challenges in urban centers, rural communities, and Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools (Hirai, 2016). Flexibility in interpreting DepEd directives enables school leaders to respond to local realities, such as resource limitations, cultural practices, or community expectations. For example, a memorandum on inclusive education may be applied differently in a city school compared to an IP school, reflecting the distinct needs of learners. This adaptability ensures that policies are not applied mechanically but are contextualized to serve students more effectively. However, excessive divergence risks eroding the integrity of national policy goals. When interpretations stray too far from the original intent, coherence is lost, and disparities widen. Thus, while autonomy is valuable, it must be balanced with shared understanding, clear communication, and accountability mechanisms to safeguard the consistency of educational reforms.

III. COUNTRY POLICY (LEGAL BASIS)

The Philippine Constitution, specifically Article XIV, Section 1, guarantees the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 2024). This constitutional mandate establishes education as both a right and a responsibility of the State, requiring mechanisms to ensure that policies are consistently applied across schools. The Department of Education (DepEd), as the primary agency tasked with implementing this mandate, issues orders and memorandums to operationalize national policies. These directives are meant to standardize practices, promote accountability, and safeguard equity in the delivery of education. However, when school heads interpret these policies differently, the constitutional promise of quality education risks being unevenly realized. Thus, the Constitution serves as the ultimate legal anchor, reminding educational leaders that their interpretations must align with the broader goal of protecting learners' rights.

Beyond the Constitution, Republic Act No. 9155, the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, provides the statutory framework for school leadership and governance. This law emphasizes the role of school heads as instructional leaders and managers of school operations, granting them authority to make decisions that respond to local contexts. At the same time, RA 9155 requires alignment with national policies to ensure coherence across the education system. This dual responsibility, autonomy with accountability creates tension when interpretations diverge. For example, a school head may emphasize compliance with DepEd memorandums to demonstrate accountability, while another may prioritize contextual adaptation to meet local needs. When these interpretations stray too far apart, the intent of the law is

compromised, as coherence and equity are undermined. Therefore, grounding school leadership in legal mandates is essential to harmonize practices across schools, ensuring that autonomy does not erode the integrity of national educational goals.

IV. RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How does framing the issue as a rights concern change the solution?

When divergent interpretations of DepEd orders and memorandums are framed as a rights issue, the focus shifts from administrative efficiency to the constitutional and moral obligation of the State to uphold learners' entitlement to consistent and equitable education. Policies are no longer seen merely as management tools but as instruments to guarantee the right of every child to quality learning opportunities. For example, if one school head interprets a memorandum on inclusive education as optional while another enforces it strictly, learners in marginalized communities such as Indigenous Peoples (IP) or children with disabilities may be deprived of their rights. This reframing compels policymakers and school leaders to recognize that inconsistent application of directives is not just a technical gap but a violation of learners' rights to equal treatment and access.

Moreover, treating divergent interpretations as a rights issue demands clarity, accountability, and fairness in policy communication. It obliges DepEd to simplify language in its orders, provide training for school heads, and establish monitoring mechanisms that ensure uniformity of practice. It also requires school leaders to critically reflect on their role not only as managers but as guardians of learners' rights. In this sense, the solution moves beyond administrative adjustments toward systemic reforms that safeguard equity. By grounding the issue in rights, the education system is compelled to harmonize diverse interpretations into a coherent practice that respects both national policy goals and the dignity of every learner.

V. PROPOSED SOLUTION

To address divergent interpretations of DepEd policies, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. The following solutions aim to harmonize school leadership practices while safeguarding the constitutional right to quality education:

Policy Simplification: DepEd orders and memorandums must be written in clearer, standardized language to minimize ambiguity. Technical jargon or overly complex phrasing often leads to misinterpretation. By simplifying directives and providing explanatory notes or implementation guides, school heads can better understand the intent of policies. This ensures that directives are not only legally sound but also practically applicable in diverse school contexts.

Capacity-Building Programs: Continuous professional development for school heads is essential. Training sessions, workshops, and seminars should focus on policy interpretation, legal frameworks, and leadership competencies. These programs will empower school leaders to make informed decisions that



align with national goals while addressing local realities. In particular, capacity-building should emphasize the dual responsibility of autonomy and accountability as mandated by Republic Act 9155.

Collaborative Dialogue: Establishing regular forums for school heads to discuss interpretations and share best practices can reduce divergence. Peer learning and collective reflection foster a culture of collaboration rather than isolation. Through dialogue, school leaders can clarify ambiguities, reconcile differences, and develop shared strategies for implementation. This also strengthens professional solidarity and builds a network of support across schools.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Stronger accountability mechanisms must be put in place to ensure consistent implementation of policies. DepEd should develop monitoring systems that track how directives are applied across schools, identifying gaps and inconsistencies. Evaluation reports can then inform revisions of policies and guide targeted interventions. This process reinforces transparency and ensures that policies are not only issued but effectively realized in practice.

Rights-Based Framing: Finally, policies should be framed not merely as administrative directives but as instruments to uphold learners' constitutional rights. This perspective compels school heads to view their role as protectors of equity and quality education. By grounding policy interpretation in rights, leaders are reminded that inconsistent application is not just a managerial lapse but a potential violation of learners' entitlement to fair and equal opportunities. This framing elevates the urgency of harmonizing interpretations and strengthens the moral and legal accountability of school governance.

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Legal Basis

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