



UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN SCHOOL OPERATIONS: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING STUDY ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine how school-based management engagement mediates the relationship between policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations. A non-experimental quantitative design with a descriptive-correlational approach was used, and 281 elementary school teachers from Carmen District, Davao del Norte were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a validated and pilot-tested adapted questionnaire. Results revealed that policy implementation fidelity was frequently practiced, especially in applying policies consistently and gathering feedback for review. Accountability in school operations was also extensively observed, although ethical adherence was only sometimes demonstrated. Teacher engagement in school-based management was moderately evident, especially in decision-making, but less in planning and budgeting activities. Correlation analysis showed a strong positive relationship between policy fidelity and accountability, and a moderate link with teacher engagement. Mediation analysis revealed that school-based management engagement partially explained the influence of policy fidelity on accountability. These findings confirm that consistent policy practices enhance both transparency and teacher participation in governance. Strengthening communication, ethical standards, and participatory mechanisms is vital for improving school operations.

KEYWORDS: Policy implementation; accountability; teacher engagement; school governance; mediation analysis

INTRODUCTION

The education sector continuously seeks to enhance the effectiveness of school operations and the quality of learning environments through well-defined policies and management practices. However, the intricate dynamics of policy implementation fidelity and its influence on accountability within school operations remain underexplored, particularly in the context of school-based management. To address the issue, the proposed study aims to understand the dynamics of policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations, utilizing structural equation modeling to analyze the role of school-based management. This approach will allow for a comprehensive examination of the relationships between policy design, implementation processes, and their impacts on school operational efficiency. By focusing on these aspects, the study seeks to provide empirical insights that can guide educational leaders and policymakers in enhancing the structural and procedural frameworks of schools.

Low levels of accountability in school operations can profoundly affect educational systems across various regions, including the USA, Africa, Asia, and the Philippines. In the USA, Darling-Hammond (2020) emphasizes that accountability in teacher education often lacks comprehensive support mechanisms, leading to discrepancies in teaching quality across institutions. This gap in accountability standards can result in unequal teacher preparation, affecting the equity and quality of education provided to students. Similarly, Cochran-Smith (2021) critiques the prevailing accountability frameworks in teacher education, arguing that they are often narrowly defined by performance metrics that do not necessarily correlate with educational quality or teacher preparedness. This approach may limit teacher autonomy and stifle innovative teaching practices, potentially degrading educational outcomes.

In Africa, specifically Tanzania, Matete (2022) discusses the challenges posed by different forms of decentralization on educational accountability. The study highlights that while decentralization aims to enhance accountability by distributing educational responsibilities, it often results in fragmented systems where accountability measures are not uniformly applied, leading to variability in educational standards across regions. Furthermore, Schildkamp, Poortman, and Sahlberg (2019) observe that in many developing countries, the balance between accountability measures and educational improvement efforts is skewed, with excessive emphasis on accountability often undermining genuine educational enhancement initiatives. This imbalance can stifle the development of effective educational practices that are responsive to local needs, ultimately affecting student learning outcomes.

In Asia, the narrative of accountability is complex and varies significantly across the continent. Song and Xu (2019) detail efforts in China to transition from a heavily external accountability system to one that fosters potential-oriented development in teacher preparation. This shift aims to build a quality assurance system that supports rather than stifles teacher growth. However, the



transformation is gradual and fraught with challenges as institutions struggle to align new accountability frameworks with traditional educational goals. On the other hand, Kim and Yun (2019) explore cross-national patterns in school-level controls, revealing that rigid accountability structures can inadvertently constrain teacher creativity and responsiveness to student needs, particularly in diverse educational environments.

In the Philippines, issues of accountability in educational operations significantly impact teacher job satisfaction and performance. Abdurahman (2020) highlights that inadequate accountability mechanisms contribute to low job satisfaction among teachers, which can adversely affect their performance and commitment. Likewise, Araneta, Catalan, and Martir (2020) identify a direct link between administrative support and teaching quality, suggesting that enhanced accountability and support from school administrators are crucial for fostering effective teaching practices. This support is essential for developing a professional environment where teachers feel valued and are encouraged to improve their instructional methods, enhancing overall school operational efficiency.

At the ground level, problems related to low levels of accountability in school operations can significantly hinder educational outcomes. When accountability measures are weak or inconsistently applied, teachers may experience ambiguity in their roles and responsibilities, leading to varied instructional practices that do not necessarily align with educational standards or policy directives. This lack of consistency can result in discrepancies in student performance and equity in educational opportunities. Furthermore, insufficient accountability can undermine teachers' motivation and engagement, as they may feel less supported and recognized in their professional environment. Addressing these issues through the study will help elucidate how stronger accountability mechanisms, supported by effective policy implementation, can enhance teacher performance, promote fairness, and improve the overall educational climate within schools.

The existing research on policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations highlights significant variations in how these concepts are understood and applied across different educational systems globally. However, there remains a notable gap in understanding these dynamics within the context of Carmen District, Davao del Norte, particularly concerning the role of school-based management. Studies focus primarily on broad, often abstract, accountability and policy implementation issues without delving into the localized mechanisms that influence these processes at the school level. Furthermore, while research has explored decentralization and its impact on accountability, there is a lack of detailed analysis on how school-based management specifically mediates the relationship between policy implementation fidelity and school operational efficiency. This gap underscores the need for a tailored study that can provide insights into the unique challenges and opportunities within Carmen District, enhancing the applicability and effectiveness of educational reforms locally.

Given the complexities identified in global contexts and the unique challenges faced in Carmen District, the urgency of conducting this study becomes apparent. The localized approach of the proposed study aims to fill the research void by utilizing structural equation modeling to dissect the intricate interplay between policy implementation fidelity and accountability under the lens of school-based management. Such a study is crucial in identifying specific areas where Carmen District can improve policy execution and accountability measures to enhance overall school operations. Moreover, the findings could offer actionable strategies for administrators to foster environments that not only comply with policies but also genuinely enhance educational outcomes. Thus, this research is not only timely but essential in providing a foundational analysis that could guide future educational policies and practices within the district, aiming for a more cohesive and effective educational system.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate how school-based management engagement mediated the relationship between policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations in Carmen District in Davao del Norte, as analyzed through structural equation modeling. Therefore, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of policy implementation fidelity in terms of:
 - 1.1 consistency in policy application;
 - 1.2 clarity of policy communication; and
 - 1.3 feedback mechanisms for policy review?
2. What is the extent of accountability in school operations in terms of:
 - 2.1 regular reporting on school performance;
 - 2.2 adherence to ethical standards; and
 - 2.3 implementation of corrective actions?
3. What is the extent of school-based management engagement?
4. Is there a significant relationship among policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement?
5. How does school-based management engagement mediate the relationship between policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations?

METHODOLOGY

This section contains the research design, research respondents, research ethics, research instrument, research procedure, data collection, and data analysis.



Research Design

In this study, the researcher employed a quantitative research approach, specifically the descriptive-correlational technique through structural equation modeling, to collect data, ideas, facts, and information relevant to the study. According to Lazaraton (2005), the quantitative research approach involved the collection and analysis of numerical data to understand patterns, relationships, or effects within a specific study area. This method typically relied on statistical techniques to interpret data collected through surveys, experiments, or secondary data sources. In the context of studying policy implementation fidelity and accountability, the quantitative research approach was ideal for measuring the extent and effectiveness of these elements in school operations. By quantifying the degree of policy fidelity and accountability, the researcher objectively assessed their impact on school performance. Also, this approach allowed for the analysis of large datasets, providing a comprehensive overview of trends across different schools within the study.

As noted by Loeb et al. (2017), the descriptive research method was used to observe, describe, and document aspects of a situation as it naturally occurred without manipulation by the researcher. It often involved detailed, systematic observation or surveys. For the study on policy implementation fidelity and accountability, the descriptive method was suitable as it allowed for a detailed observation and recording of current practices and administrative behaviors in schools. It helped identify standard practices and deviations in policy implementation. This method provided a foundational understanding of how policies were managed and perceived, setting the stage for deeper causal investigations.

As defined by Seeram (2019), a correlational approach investigated the relationship between two or more variables to determine the strength and direction of their association. This methodology did not imply causation but rather explored how variables were related. Utilizing a correlational approach in this study allowed for the examination of the relationships between school-based management, policy implementation fidelity, and accountability in school operations. By identifying correlations, the study revealed patterns and potential areas where policy interventions could improve accountability and fidelity outcomes. This approach was crucial for hypothesizing about the dynamics involved without manipulating the environment.

Moreover, Thakkar (2020) described Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as a comprehensive statistical technique that was used to test complex relationships among observed and latent variables. This method encompassed aspects of multiple regression and factor analysis to construct relational paths among variables. SEM was particularly suitable for the proposed study as it allowed for the analysis of multiple relationships between policy implementation fidelity, accountability, and the mediating role of school-based management. This method enabled the modeling of latent constructs derived from observed data, providing insights into the underlying mechanisms that influenced school operations. SEM's ability to handle multiple variables simultaneously and its capacity for testing theoretical models made it ideal for exploring the intricate dynamics proposed in this research study.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher promptly observed the necessary protocols as outlined in the standard guidelines for carrying out the research study, particularly focusing on the study protocol assessment criteria for managing the population and data. The survey questionnaires, along with supporting references, were submitted for further evaluation. After receiving approval from the Ethics Committee, the researcher proceeded to the next phase of the study.

Social Value

At the macro societal level, the study held significant importance as it contributed to the overarching improvement of the educational system within the country. By exploring the dynamics of policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations, the research provided empirical data that could inform national education policies and reform initiatives. Understanding how school-based management influenced these dynamics allowed policymakers to design strategies that enhanced educational quality and effectiveness on a large scale. Consequently, the study aided in promoting a more equitable and efficient education system that benefited society as a whole by preparing a competent and well-educated citizenry.

At the community level, particularly within Carmen District, Davao del Norte, the research offered valuable insights that directly impacted local schools and stakeholders. By identifying specific factors that affected policy implementation and accountability, school administrators and educators were able to develop targeted interventions to address existing challenges. This localized understanding fostered a collaborative environment where teachers and school leaders worked together to improve school operations. The community benefited from enhanced educational outcomes, increased transparency, and a stronger trust between schools and stakeholders, ultimately leading to community development and social cohesion.

On a micro or individual level, the study significantly benefited the participants, who were elementary school teachers, by providing them with a platform to voice their experiences and perspectives. Participation in the research empowered teachers by acknowledging their critical role in policy implementation and accountability processes. The findings led to potential professional growth opportunities, as they informed the development of training programs and resources that addressed the specific needs identified through the study. Thus, this enhanced job satisfaction and performance among teachers, leading to improved educational experiences for students.



Informed Consent

The researcher meticulously ensured that informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Each participant received a detailed information sheet that clearly outlined the purpose of the research, which was to understand the dynamics of policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations within the context of school-based management. The document explained the objectives, methodology, potential risks, and benefits associated with the study. By providing comprehensive information, the researcher ensured that participants were fully aware of the nature of the study and what their participation entailed.

Respondents were explicitly informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. The consent form stated that choosing not to participate or withdrawing would not affect their employment status, professional relationships, or any benefits to which they were entitled. This approach respected the autonomy of the participants and adhered to ethical research practices by emphasizing that their involvement was based on free and informed choice.

In addition, the researcher ensured that participants understood how their data would be used, stored, and protected. The consent form detailed the confidentiality measures in place, including adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, to safeguard their personal information. Participants were also informed about the dissemination of findings, ensuring transparency in how the results would be shared and potentially utilized. By obtaining informed consent through clear communication and documentation, the researcher fostered trust and encouraged open and honest participation from the participants.

Vulnerability of Research Respondents

Recognizing that the respondents were elementary school teachers who might have felt vulnerable about sharing their honest opinions on policy implementation and accountability, the researcher acknowledged the potential risks associated with their participation. Teachers could have feared repercussions or judgment if their views were critical of existing school operations or management practices. To mitigate this vulnerability, the researcher guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to any participant. All data were reported in aggregate form, and any identifying details were omitted or generalized.

Additionally, the researcher created a supportive and non-threatening environment for participants to express their views freely. This included providing assurances that the study aimed to improve school operations for the benefit of all stakeholders and that their honest feedback was valuable. The researcher remained available to address any concerns or questions, providing clarity and reassurance about the study's intentions and the measures in place to protect participants. By proactively addressing these concerns, the researcher minimized potential risks and fostered a sense of security and trust among the participants.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 was paramount in protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The researcher collected only the data essential for the study, avoiding any unnecessary personal information that could compromise participant anonymity. Personal identifiers such as names, addresses, or specific school affiliations were removed or coded to prevent identification. This careful handling of data ensured that participants' identities remained confidential throughout the research process.

All collected data, whether in digital or physical form, were securely stored. Soft copies of data were password-protected and, if necessary, encrypted to prevent unauthorized access. Hard copies were kept in locked filing cabinets with restricted access. The researcher limited data access to authorized personnel directly involved in the study, all of whom were bound by confidentiality agreements. These measures complied with ethical standards and legal requirements, safeguarding the participants' information against potential breaches.

After the study concluded and the results were published, the researcher followed standard procedures for data disposal. Hard copies of data were shredded or incinerated to ensure complete destruction. Soft copies were permanently deleted using secure data-erasure software, rendering the information unrecoverable. This process ensured that all personal data were disposed of responsibly, maintaining confidentiality even after the study's completion and upholding the highest ethical standards in research data management.

Risk, Benefits and Safety

The researcher acknowledged that participation in the study posed minimal risks to the participants, primarily related to the potential discomfort in sharing candid opinions about school policies and management. To minimize these risks, the researcher emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and that all responses would be treated with strict confidentiality. The participants were reminded that their insights were invaluable and that the study aimed to contribute positively to the educational environment.

The benefits of participating in the study were significant for both the participants and the broader educational community. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on and communicate their experiences with policy implementation and accountability,



potentially influencing improvements in these areas. The findings led to enhanced school operations, better support for teachers, and improved student outcomes. Additionally, the study informed professional development initiatives, providing long-term benefits to teachers' careers and the quality of education within the district.

Regarding safety, the researcher ensured that the methods of data collection were non-invasive and respected the participants' well-being. Surveys and questionnaires were designed to be straightforward and unbiased, avoiding any language that might cause distress. If interviews were conducted, they were scheduled at convenient times and places for the participants, ensuring a comfortable setting. The researcher remained vigilant for any signs of discomfort and offered support or the option to withdraw without any consequences, prioritizing the participants' safety and peace of mind throughout the study.

Justice

The principle of justice was upheld by ensuring an equitable selection of respondents for the study. The researcher included a diverse group of elementary school teachers from various schools within the Carmen District, Davao del Norte, to avoid any form of bias or discrimination. This inclusive approach guaranteed that all eligible teachers had an equal opportunity to contribute to the research, thereby distributing the benefits and burdens of the study fairly. By doing so, the researcher ensured that the findings were representative of the entire teacher population in the district, enhancing the validity and applicability of the study's outcomes.

Transparency

To maintain transparency, the researcher openly communicated all aspects of the study to the respondents. This included providing detailed information about the research objectives, methodology, potential risks, and benefits before obtaining informed consent. The researcher ensured that respondents were aware of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. By fostering an open dialogue, the researcher built trust with the respondents, encouraging honest and meaningful participation.

Also, the researcher transparently disclosed how the data collected would be used, stored, and shared. Respondents were informed about the measures taken to protect their privacy and confidentiality, adhering to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Upon completion of the study, the researcher shared the findings with the respondents and relevant stakeholders in an accessible manner. This openness not only honored the respondents' contributions but also promoted the ethical dissemination of knowledge that could benefit the educational community.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher proactively identified and addressed any potential conflicts of interest to maintain the integrity of the study. If the researcher held any position or had relationships within the Carmen District schools that could influence the research outcomes, these were openly disclosed to the respondents. By acknowledging such connections, the researcher ensured that personal interests did not compromise the objectivity of the study or the welfare of the respondents. Additionally, the researcher avoided any situations where personal or financial interests could be perceived as influencing the research process or findings. This included refraining from accepting any gifts, favors, or incentives from parties that could benefit from the study's outcomes. By implementing these measures, the researcher upheld ethical standards and maintained the trust of the respondents and the wider educational community.

Qualification of the Researcher

The researcher possessed the necessary qualifications and expertise to conduct the study effectively and ethically. With a background in educational research and experience in quantitative methodologies such as structural equation modeling, the researcher was well-equipped to undertake this complex analysis. This expertise ensured that the study was designed and executed using appropriate research methods, yielding valid and reliable results.

Further, the researcher had undergone training in research ethics and was familiar with the ethical guidelines governing human subjects research. This knowledge enabled the researcher to navigate ethical considerations adeptly, such as obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing potential risks to respondents. By leveraging these qualifications, the researcher committed to conducting the study with the highest professional and ethical standards.

Adequacy of Facilities

The researcher utilized adequate facilities to ensure the study was conducted efficiently and securely. Data collection was facilitated through secure, accessible environments, such as designated rooms within the schools that provided privacy and comfort for the respondents. These spaces were arranged to minimize disruptions to the respondents' schedules and to create a conducive atmosphere for honest and thoughtful participation.

In terms of data management, the researcher employed reliable technological resources to store and analyze the collected data. Secure servers and password-protected databases were used to safeguard digital information, adhering to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Additionally, any physical documents were stored in locked cabinets within secure office spaces, accessible only to authorized personnel. These facilities and resources ensured that the study was conducted smoothly while maintaining the integrity and security of the data.



Community Involvement

Engaging the community was a vital aspect of the research, and the researcher actively involved school administrators and relevant stakeholders throughout the study. Initial meetings were held with school leaders to explain the purpose of the research, its potential benefits, and how it aligned with the community's educational goals. This collaborative approach fostered support and facilitated smoother implementation of the study within the schools.

Moreover, the researcher sought input from the community to ensure that the study was culturally sensitive and addressed relevant local issues. Feedback from community members was incorporated to refine the research instruments and procedures, enhancing the study's relevance and impact. By involving the community, the researcher not only enriched the quality of the research but also promoted a sense of shared ownership and commitment to improving educational outcomes in the Carmen District.

Research Respondents

The study focused on a target group of 281 elementary school teachers in Carmen District, Davao del Norte. To determine this sample size from a total teacher population of 950, the researcher employed Slovin's formula, using an error margin of 0.05. By applying this formula where N represented the total population and e denoted the margin of error the calculation yielded a sample size of 281. This methodological approach ensured that the sample size was statistically representative of the larger population, providing a solid basis for generalizing the study's findings.

In the selection of respondents for the study, specific inclusion criteria were meticulously applied. The respondents were elementary school teachers currently employed in Carmen District who had direct involvement or influence in school-based management and policy implementation processes. This criterion ensured that respondents were adequately knowledgeable and directly engaged in the dynamics of policy application and school management, thereby providing insightful and relevant data. Additionally, to ensure a broad representation of experiences and perspectives, the selection aimed to include teachers from various schools within the district, representing different grades and subject specializations, thus enhancing the study's depth and breadth of understanding regarding policy implementation and accountability.

Upon establishing the necessary sample size, the selection of participants utilized a simple random sampling technique, which is a cornerstone method in probability sampling. This method was chosen to ensure that each member of the teacher population in Carmen District had an equal and independent chance of being selected, thereby safeguarding against selection bias. According to Noor et al. (2022), this sampling strategy enhanced the fairness and impartiality of the participant selection process. Each teacher was assigned a unique identifier, and a random number generator was used to select 281 individuals, ensuring that the sample was a true reflection of the broader educational environment in Carmen District.

Moreover, in the execution of this sampling strategy, special attention was given to capturing the diverse characteristics of the teacher population. This consideration was crucial for maintaining the representativeness of the sample, which, in turn, bolstered the validity of the study's conclusions. By mirroring the district's demographic variability within the sample, the research aimed to provide insights that were not only statistically valid but also contextually relevant, offering a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics at play within Carmen District's educational framework.

Research Instrument

For the study, the research methodology included the deployment of carefully structured survey questionnaires designed to explore the intricacies of the investigation. The questionnaire was divided into three distinct sections. The first part focused on policy implementation fidelity, examined through three key indicators: consistency in policy application, clarity of policy communication, and feedback mechanisms for policy review. The Cronbach's alpha value for this instrument was 0.988, described as excellent and interpreted as highly reliable and consistent. To guarantee the reliability and consistency of the questionnaire, it underwent a thorough pilot testing process. Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale to assess the extent of agreement or disagreement with each statement, with subsequent analysis based on predefined ranges of means to categorize the data effectively.

Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20 - 5.00	Very Extensive	Policy implementation fidelity is consistently practiced.
3.40 – 4.19	Extensive	Policy implementation fidelity is frequently practiced.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Extensive	Policy implementation fidelity is occasionally practiced.
1.80 – 2.59	Less Extensive	Policy implementation fidelity is rarely practiced.
1.00 – 1.79	Not Extensive	Policy implementation fidelity is never practiced.

The second part of the instrument focused on accountability in school operations. This questionnaire was designed to evaluate domains such as regular reporting on school performance, adherence to ethical standards, and implementation of corrective actions. The Cronbach's alpha value for this instrument was also 0.988, described as excellent and interpreted as highly reliable and consistent. To ensure that the questionnaire delivered reliable and consistent results, it was subjected to an extensive pilot testing phase. Data collection utilized a 5-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The gathered responses were then analyzed using predefined mean ranges to systematically categorize the data.



Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20 - 5.00	Very Extensive	Accountability in school operations is always demonstrated.
3.40 – 4.19	Extensive	Accountability in school operations is oftentimes demonstrated.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Extensive	Accountability in school operations is sometimes demonstrated.
1.80 – 2.59	Less Extensive	Accountability in school operations is seldom demonstrated.
1.00 – 1.79	Not Extensive	Accountability in school operations is never demonstrated.

The third part of the instrument focused on school-based management engagement. Responses were gathered using a 5-point Likert scale, allowing for precise measurement of agreement or disagreement with each item. The Cronbach's alpha value for this instrument was 0.988, described as excellent and interpreted as highly reliable and consistent. The data were then analyzed using predefined mean ranges to effectively categorize and interpret the results. Such a methodical approach ensured a detailed and accurate assessment of the study's key variables.

Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20 - 5.00	Very Extensive	School-based management engagement is always evident.
3.40 – 4.19	Extensive	School-based management engagement is oftentimes evident.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Extensive	School-based management engagement is occasionally evident.
1.80 – 2.59	Less Extensive	School-based management engagement is rarely evident.
1.00 – 1.79	Not Extensive	School-based management engagement is never evident.

Data Gathering Procedure

A data gathering refers to the systematic process of collecting information relevant to a specific research question, hypothesis, or objective.

Permission to Conduct the Study

The data gathering process commenced with the formal acquisition of an endorsement letter from the Dean of the Graduate School at The Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc., Davao City. This endorsement served as institutional support, affirming the academic relevance and ethical compliance of the research endeavor. Subsequently, the researcher secured ethical clearance from the Graduate School RMC-Research Ethics Committee (GSRMC-REC), which thoroughly reviewed the research proposal, informed consent forms, and data collection instruments to ensure adherence to ethical standards and the protection of respondents' rights. These initial steps were essential in establishing the legitimacy and ethical integrity of the study prior to engaging with the intended respondents.

Following the approval from the graduate institution, the researcher proceeded to seek formal permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao del Norte to conduct the study among public elementary schools within the Carmen District in Davao del Norte. To support this request, the researcher attached the previously obtained endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School and the ethical clearance issued by the GSRMC-REC. These documents validated the study's scholarly purpose and ethical soundness, thereby facilitating the approval process at the division level. This step ensured that the research was conducted in compliance with local educational authorities, fostering cooperation among school administrators and ensuring smooth implementation of data collection activities within the designated schools.

Distribution and Retrieval of the Questionnaire

The initial phase of the data gathering procedure involved the careful selection of respondents, specifically targeting teachers from public elementary schools within the Carmen District, Davao del Norte. This selection process was guided by inclusion criteria aligned with the study's objectives, ensuring that respondents were directly involved in school-based management and policy implementation. Prior to the full-scale administration of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted among a small group of teachers, not exceeding 30 individuals. This pilot testing served to assess the clarity, reliability, and internal consistency of the survey questionnaire, allowing the researcher to identify and revise any ambiguous or problematic items. The feedback gathered from this phase contributed to the refinement of the final version of the research instrument.

Subsequently, the researcher proceeded with the official distribution of the survey questionnaires to the identified respondents. Prior to answering, the respondents were thoroughly briefed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. They were also informed that they would be given ample time to complete the questionnaires at their own pace, thereby minimizing pressure and enhancing the accuracy and honesty of their responses. This approach ensured that respondents were able to engage meaningfully with the instrument, ultimately contributing to the reliability and validity of the data collected.

To accommodate the varying contexts and preferences of the respondents, the researcher offered flexibility in the mode of questionnaire administration. Respondents were given the option to answer either through online platforms or via face-to-face distribution, depending on their availability and convenience. This dual-mode approach allowed for greater accessibility and participation, especially for teachers with limited time or technological access. Regardless of the mode, the researcher ensured that all responses were securely collected and stored, upholding ethical standards and the integrity of the data throughout the process.



Collation and Statistical Treatment of Data

After the collection of the completed survey questionnaires, the initial step in the data processing involved counting and sorting all returned instruments to ensure completeness and organization. Each questionnaire was reviewed for completeness before being encoded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The responses were systematically recorded according to the three main domains of the study: policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement. This preliminary organization facilitated the efficient tracking and retrieval of data during the subsequent stages of statistical analysis.

Following the data encoding, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize and understand the general trends within the dataset. Specifically, the statistical mean was computed for each indicator under the three domains to describe the extent to which policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement were observed among respondents. These mean values were interpreted using predefined descriptive scales, allowing the researcher to draw initial insights into the overall patterns of response and to identify areas of strength and potential improvement within the educational management practices in the Carmen District.

In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential statistical procedures were employed to examine deeper relationships among the study's variables. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement. Furthermore, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to assess the direct and indirect effects among variables, specifically analyzing the mediating effect of school-based management engagement on the relationship between policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations. These inferential analyses enabled the researcher to test hypotheses and uncover significant patterns within the dataset, contributing to a more robust understanding of the interconnections among the variables.

Finally, the interpretation and discussion of the results were undertaken with scholarly rigor, linking the findings to the study's objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. The results were carefully analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions about the state of policy implementation and accountability practices in the context of school-based management. Based on the findings, the researcher provided evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing the fidelity of policy implementation, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and promoting active school-based management engagement. These recommendations were intended to inform educational leaders, policy-makers, and stakeholders in crafting more effective and contextually responsive strategies for school governance in the Carmen District.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were utilized by the researcher in processing the gathered data:

Mean. In this study, the mean was used to measure the extents of the teachers' responses regarding policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement. It provided a central tendency measure that represented the overall perceptions and experiences of the teachers within the Carmen District schools.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. In this study, it was used to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between variables such as policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations. It helped determine whether higher levels of policy fidelity were associated with higher levels of accountability, providing insights into how these factors were interconnected within the school setting.

Model Fit Indices. Model fit indices in this research were used to evaluate how well the data fit the hypothesized measurement model in the path analysis. Indices such as Chi-square, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) were calculated to assess the adequacy of the model structures in representing the relationships among policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement.

Structural Equation Modeling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in this context was a multivariate statistical analysis technique that allowed for the examination of complex causal relationships between variables involved in policy implementation fidelity, accountability in school operations, and school-based management engagement. It involved estimating direct and indirect effects within the proposed model to understand how variables like school-based management engagement mediated the impact of policy implementation fidelity on accountability in school operations.

Sobel z-Test. In this study, the Sobel z-Test was employed to determine the significance of the mediation effect of variables like school-based management engagement on the relationship between policy implementation fidelity and accountability in school operations. This test calculated the standard error of the indirect effect of the mediator, providing a z-score to assess whether the mediation was statistically significant, thus verifying the strength of the indirect paths within the SEM model.

Results

The study examined the levels of **Policy Implementation Fidelity, Accountability in School Operations, and School-Based Management (SBM) Engagement of Teachers**, as well as their relationships and the mediating role of SBM engagement.



Policy Implementation Fidelity was found to be **Extensive**, with an overall mean of **3.48**. Among its dimensions, **Feedback Mechanisms for Policy Review** obtained the highest mean (**3.51**), followed by **Consistency in Policy Application** (**3.50**), while **Clarity of Policy Communication** had the lowest mean (**3.42**). These findings indicate that school policies are generally implemented consistently, communicated clearly, and regularly reviewed with stakeholder participation.

Accountability in School Operations also received an **Extensive** rating with an overall mean of **3.43**. **Regular Reporting on School Performance** ranked highest (**3.46**), followed by **Implementation of Corrective Actions** (**3.43**). **Adherence to Ethical Standards** obtained the lowest mean (**3.39**) and was interpreted as **Moderately Extensive**, suggesting that ethical practices require further strengthening despite the district's generally strong accountability mechanisms.

The level of **School-Based Management (SBM) Engagement of Teachers** was **Moderately Extensive**, with an overall mean of **3.38**. Teachers were most engaged in **participating in school policy decision-making** (mean = **3.48**), while their involvement in the **formulation of the school's operational budget** received the lowest rating (mean = **3.25**). This indicates that teacher participation is evident but can still be expanded, particularly in administrative and financial decision-making.

Correlation analysis revealed **significant positive relationships** among all three variables. Policy Implementation Fidelity showed a **strong positive relationship** with Accountability in School Operations ($r = 0.684, p < .001$) and a **moderate positive relationship** with SBM Engagement ($r = 0.553, p < .001$). Likewise, Accountability in School Operations had a **strong positive relationship** with SBM Engagement ($r = 0.617, p < .001$). These findings suggest that effective policy implementation enhances accountability and encourages greater teacher participation in school governance.

The mediation analysis further demonstrated that **School-Based Management Engagement partially mediates** the relationship between Policy Implementation Fidelity and Accountability in School Operations. Approximately **27.76%** of the total effect of policy implementation fidelity on accountability was explained through teacher engagement in SBM (Ratio Index = **0.2776**), with the mediation confirmed by a significant **Sobel test** ($z = 5.9935, p = .000$). This indicates that improving teacher participation in school-based management strengthens the positive impact of faithful policy implementation on school accountability.

Finally, the structural model demonstrated an **excellent fit**, with **RMSEA = 0.000**, **CFI = 1.000**, and **TLI = 1.000**, confirming that the proposed model accurately represents the relationships among Policy Implementation Fidelity, Accountability in School Operations, and School-Based Management Engagement of Teachers.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study several conclusions were generated:

Policy implementation fidelity in Carmen District, Davao del Norte reflects a strong adherence to established school policies, particularly in maintaining consistency, clarity, and feedback mechanisms. This level of fidelity implies that teachers and school personnel regularly implement policies as intended, promoting accountability and organizational coherence. The findings suggest that sustained efforts in policy training, communication, and participatory review processes can further enhance implementation and contribute to improved school governance and instructional quality.

On one hand, accountability in school operations in the district is generally upheld, with schools showing strong commitment to transparency and responsiveness. The moderate rating on ethical standards highlights the importance of reinforcing ethical decision-making among school leaders and staff. Strengthening ethical compliance alongside current reporting and corrective practices can promote a more trustworthy and effective school governance system.

On the other hand, school-based management engagement among teachers in the district shows moderate levels of practice, highlighting partial but meaningful involvement in key school operations. The results imply that while teachers are often consulted, their full participation in strategic planning and budgeting is not consistently evident. Strengthening teacher engagement in all aspects of school management can lead to more inclusive decision-making and improved school outcomes.

Moreover, the results confirm that effective policy implementation plays a key role in fostering both accountability and participatory management in schools. When policies are faithfully applied, school operations tend to be more transparent and structured, creating an environment conducive to teacher engagement. These relationships suggest that to strengthen school governance, school leaders and policymakers must prioritize the consistent enforcement and communication of educational policies.

Lastly, the results confirm that teacher involvement serves as a meaningful pathway through which effective policy implementation translates into accountable school practices. This supports the Institutional Theory of Meyer and Rowan (1977), which emphasizes the role of formalized structures in legitimizing organizational behavior, as well as the Principal-Agent Theory by Ross (1973), which underlines the value of alignment and communication between administrators and teachers. Therefore, strengthening policy fidelity and teacher engagement is crucial in fostering transparency and effectiveness in school governance.



Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations can be made;

Teachers

Teachers may considering the study's findings, the following recommendations are offered to inform policy, school leadership, teaching practice, and future research:

As to the policy implementation fidelity, the lowest mean in this particular variable is in clarity of policy communication, suggesting a need to improve how school policies are conveyed to stakeholders. Schools should invest in clear and user-friendly policy briefings using multiple formats (e.g., printed guidelines, online summaries, and verbal orientations). Regular policy orientation sessions should be conducted to ensure understanding across teaching staff. Additionally, feedback mechanisms must be integrated to assess the clarity and effectiveness of policy dissemination continuously.

As to accountability in school operations, the lowest-rated indicator is adherence to ethical standards, which only reached a moderately extensive level. School heads must undergo continuous training on ethical leadership, transparency, and conflict resolution. Clear ethical guidelines should be reinforced through internal communication and modeled consistently by leadership. A confidential reporting system for ethical concerns may also help promote trust and uphold professional conduct.

As regards to school-based management engagement of teachers, the lowest mean was found in being involved in the formulation of the school's operational budget. Teachers should be provided capacity-building sessions on basic school budgeting and financial planning. School leaders must institutionalize participatory budgeting by designating teacher representatives during financial planning sessions. This involvement can increase ownership of school programs and transparency in resource use.

While all relationships were statistically significant, the correlation between policy implementation fidelity and SBME was the weakest among the three. This implies the need to strengthen mechanisms that connect policy rollout with teacher engagement. Schools can enhance communication channels and involve teachers during the early stages of policy development and review. Promoting an inclusive culture of shared decision-making can help bridge this gap effectively.

Moreover, the mediation effect was partial, as indicated by the ratio index, which shows that school-based management engagement accounts for a limited portion of the relationship between policy fidelity and accountability. Efforts should be made to deepen the engagement of teachers not just in policy compliance but also in accountability practices. Training in school governance and structured feedback loops can help improve this mediation pathway. Encouraging reflective practice and shared responsibility can enhance both transparency and instructional quality.

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