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Relevance and Implementation of MEEM Curriculum Competencies Among School Principals

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Abstract

This study examined the relevance and implementation of Master in Education major in Educational Management (MEEM) curriculum competencies among school principals in the Bohol Division who graduated from Bohol Island State University–Main Campus between Academic Years 2005–2006 and 2019–2020. Anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory, Instructional Leadership Theory, Human Capital Theory, Adult Learning Theory, and the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), the study employed a mixed-method explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data were collected from 20 purposively selected school principals using a validated researcher-developed questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained from 10 selected participants. Findings revealed that MEEM curriculum competencies were highly relevant (grand mean = 3.68) and fully implemented across educational management domains, particularly building connections (3.88), managing school operations and resources (3.80), and focusing on teaching and learning (3.77). Spearman's correlation analyses revealed no statistically significant relationships between perceived curriculum relevance, implementation levels, and encountered challenges ($p > 0.05$). Insufficient funding for school programs emerged as the primary challenge, while principals demonstrated effective coping mechanisms through collaboration, communication, delegation, and resource prioritization. The study concluded that the MEEM curriculum effectively bridges theoretical preparation and practical educational leadership. Recommendations emphasized curriculum enhancement, continuous professional development, structured mentoring, and strengthened stakeholder partnerships. The findings support Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, Quality Education, and SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, through improved educational leadership and accountable school governance. The study contributes to institutional sustainability by informing leadership development, responsible resource management, and continuous improvement in educational management practices.

Keywords: Adult Learning Theory; Curriculum Competencies; Educational Leadership; Educational Management; Human Capital Theory; Instructional Leadership; MEEM Curriculum; School Governance; School Principals; Transformational Leadership.

1. Introduction

Educational institutions depend on competent school leaders who can manage instructional, administrative, and organizational responsibilities. The MEEM curriculum prepares educators for these responsibilities through coursework in educational leadership, curriculum development, instructional supervision, financial management, human resource management, educational legislation, and research. Its foundation and specialization courses develop theoretical understanding, critical inquiry, and evidence-based decision-making necessary for effective

school administration (City of Malabon University [CMU], 2020; Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2019; Polytechnic University of the Philippines [PUP], n.d.). The curriculum also emphasizes professional adaptability, inclusive leadership, and sustainable school improvement. Through research and practical applications, graduates are expected to translate academic preparation into effective educational management practices (CHED, 2019; PUP, n.d.). These competencies correspond to the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), which establish expectations for professional leadership and continuous school improvement (Department of Education [DepEd], 2020). The importance of leadership preparation is further highlighted by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (2025), which reported that 24,916 of 45,199 public schools (approximately 55%) operated without designated principals. This shortage underscores the importance of strengthening leadership preparation, professional qualifications, and school head deployment to support effective educational management.

Educational leadership research emphasizes that effective school management requires strategic, instructional, administrative, and interpersonal competencies. He et al. (2024) found that principals' instructional leadership was associated with teachers' professional development in the schools they studied, highlighting the importance of instructional supervision and opportunities for professional learning. Watts (2023) synthesized evidence on the professional support required by beginning principals and identified mentoring, peer relationships, and support networks as important resources for adapting to leadership responsibilities. Strategic leadership involves establishing shared goals, promoting collaboration, and integrating evidence into institutional decisions. In a Philippine study, Lubguban et al. (2024) documented challenges involving data collection, communication, and financial resources among principals preparing school improvement plans in Davao City. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening data-informed decision-making and strategic planning competencies in educational leadership preparation. School governance and resource management require transparency, accountability, stakeholder participation, and equitable use of resources. Caro et al. (2024) examined challenges experienced by stakeholders implementing school-based management in Biliran during an educational crisis. Stakeholder collaboration connects schools with families, local government units, and community organizations. Caro et al. (2024) considered the perspectives of community stakeholders involved in school-based management, illustrating the practical importance of participation and coordination. Resource limitations and administrative demands may restrict these activities. Instructional leadership remains central to school effectiveness. Hallinger (2011) emphasized leadership for learning as a basis for instructional improvement. More recently, He et al. (2024) linked principals' instructional leadership practices with teacher professional development, including opportunities for professional learning and curriculum coordination. Together, these studies motivate examination of how MEEM graduates implement their acquired competencies in school settings.

International and Philippine research indicates that effective educational leadership requires professional preparation that responds to the conditions of individual schools. Watts (2023) reviewed research on beginning principals and identified mentoring, opportunities to learn from colleagues, and supportive professional networks as important forms of assistance. In rural Philippine settings, Pugado et al. (2025) described school heads' experiences of budget constraints, stakeholder participation difficulties, and training needs while preparing school improvement plans. Lubguban et al. (2024) similarly documented planning difficulties involving information gathering, communication, and financial resources among principals in Davao City. These studies highlight the value of preparation in strategic planning, resource management, and stakeholder coordination. He et al. (2024) provided further evidence of an association between principals' instructional leadership and teachers' professional development, although their study was conducted outside the Philippines and does not directly evaluate MEEM graduates. Caro et al. (2024) examined stakeholder experiences during school-based management implementation, illustrating the importance of collaboration and accountability. Ko (2024) documented communication, coaching, mentorship, and individualized support among school leaders in Korean schools in Baguio City and La Trinidad, Philippines. Overall, this literature underscores the need for leadership development that connects academic preparation with the practical responsibilities of school administration. The present study focuses specifically on principals in the Bohol Division who completed the MEEM program at BISU–Main Campus from Academic Years 2005–2006 to 2019–2020, examining the relevance and implementation of their acquired competencies.

The study is anchored in four complementary theories: Transformational Leadership Theory, Instructional Leadership Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Adult Learning Theory. These provide the conceptual foundation for examining the relevance and practical implementation of MEEM curriculum competencies. Transformational Leadership Theory, introduced by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), emphasizes leadership through vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Ko (2024) examined transformational leadership practices in an educational context, providing contemporary support for understanding how school leaders apply these principles. Applied to educational management, the theory explains how school principals promote organizational improvement, encourage innovation, and support teachers' professional development. Instructional Leadership Theory, developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), emphasizes the principal's responsibility for establishing instructional goals, supervising teaching practices, managing curriculum implementation, and maintaining a supportive learning environment. This perspective supports the MEEM curriculum's emphasis on instructional supervision and school improvement. Human Capital Theory, introduced by Schultz (1961), views education and professional training as investments that enhance knowledge, productivity, and institutional performance. Within educational management, graduate preparation

strengthens principals' leadership and administrative competencies. Aman-Ullah et al. (2022) found that human capital attributes were associated with organizational performance in the hospitality sector, with innovative leadership moderating the relationship between human capital knowledge and organizational performance. Adult Learning Theory, associated with Knowles (1980), emphasizes self-directed, experience-based, and problem-centered learning. It supports the practical orientation of MEEM programs, whose participants are adult professionals expected to apply graduate-level knowledge to their leadership responsibilities. Zhang and Taylor (2023) examined the relationship between andragogical leadership and technology in adult education, emphasizing their role in supporting collaborative learning and technology-mediated learning environments. The study is also grounded in Philippine educational policies. Republic Act No. 7722 establishes the role of the Commission on Higher Education in maintaining higher education standards, including those relevant to graduate education (Republic Act No. 7722, 1994), while Republic Act No. 9155, or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, recognizes school heads as instructional leaders and administrative managers responsible for effective school governance (Republic Act No. 9155, 2001). The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), adopted through DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2020, identify five leadership domains: Leading Strategically, Managing School Operations and Resources, Focusing on Teaching and Learning, Developing Self and Others, and Building Connections (Department of Education, 2020). Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, provides the legal foundation for strengthening the basic education curriculum and supports the role of school leaders in overseeing curriculum implementation (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). The Second Congressional Commission on Education (2025) highlighted systemic challenges in school leadership preparation and deployment, reinforcing the importance of aligning professional development with institutional needs. Republic Act No. 10968, or the Philippine Qualifications Framework Act, establishes a national framework for recognizing qualifications and learning outcomes, providing a broader policy context for aligning graduate education with professional competencies (Republic Act No. 10968, 2018). DepEd Order No. 83, s. 2012 further supports school-based management through participatory governance, resource accountability, and continuous institutional improvement (Department of Education, 2012). Republic Act No. 6713, or the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, establishes standards of accountability, integrity, and professionalism in public service, reinforcing the ethical responsibilities of school principals in educational governance (Republic Act No. 6713, 1989). Together, these policies establish the professional expectations against which MEEM curriculum relevance and implementation can be examined. Conceptually, the study considers the perceived relevance of MEEM curriculum competencies, their level of implementation in educational management practices, and the challenges encountered by graduates in applying their learning. These variables provide the basis for examining their relationships and developing a proposed action plan for improving graduate educational management programs.

Existing literature identifies the importance of professional preparation and continuing support in educational leadership. Practical demands include strategic planning, financial management, policy implementation, instructional supervision, and stakeholder engagement. Watts (2023) highlighted the professional support needs of beginning principals, while Lubguban et al. (2024), Pugado et al. (2025), and Caro et al. (2024) documented challenges related to school improvement planning, resources, and stakeholder participation in Philippine settings. These studies provide useful contextual evidence but do not directly establish the effectiveness of the MEEM curriculum at BISU–Main Campus. The literature reviewed provides limited specific evidence concerning the relationship between perceived relevance of MEEM curriculum competencies, their implementation, and the challenges experienced by BISU–Main Campus graduates serving as principals in the Bohol Division. To address this gap, the study examines principals' educational attainment and length of service, perceived curriculum relevance, and implementation of educational management practices across the five PPSSH domains. It also investigates relationships among curriculum relevance, competency implementation, and challenges encountered in actual school settings. Furthermore, it explores graduates' experiences in preparing for the school principal examination, performing leadership responsibilities, and coping with administrative challenges. Integration of quantitative findings and qualitative explanations informs practical curriculum improvements and a proposed action plan.

The study is primarily aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. By examining the relevance and implementation of educational management competencies, the research supports efforts to strengthen school leadership, instructional supervision, teacher development, and institutional effectiveness. The study also relates to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through its emphasis on transparent, accountable, participatory, and responsive school governance. The educational management competencies examined in the study include strategic leadership, resource management, policy implementation, and stakeholder participation, which are essential to effective institutional administration. Additionally, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is relevant to the study's emphasis on building connections among schools, families, local government units, and educational stakeholders. Strengthening these relationships supports collaborative school improvement and the effective mobilization of educational resources. These alignments reflect the study's focus on improving educational leadership preparation and supporting sustainable institutional development rather than measuring direct SDG outcomes.

The study contributes to educational, institutional, socioeconomic, and governance sustainability by examining how graduate-level leadership preparation supports the continuing improvement of schools. In terms of educational sustainability, relevant and effectively implemented MEEM competencies can strengthen instructional supervision, teacher professional development, curriculum management, and school improvement planning. These practices support the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality. For institutional and governance sustainability, the study emphasizes strategic planning, accountability, efficient resource utilization, and evidence-based decision-making. Identifying gaps between graduate preparation and actual leadership responsibilities can help educational institutions improve professional development and management systems. Regarding socioeconomic and community sustainability, effective school leadership can promote responsible resource allocation, stronger stakeholder participation, and more responsive educational services. Collaboration among principals, teachers, families, and community organizations supports shared responsibility for school improvement. The study also contributes to professional and policy sustainability by providing evidence that may guide curriculum review, leadership development programs, mentoring initiatives, and educational management policies. Its findings can assist graduate education institutions and educational authorities in aligning professional preparation with changing school leadership demands. Ultimately, examining the relevance and implementation of MEEM curriculum competencies provides a foundation for strengthening educational leadership preparation, improving institutional practices, and supporting the long-term development of quality and responsive schools.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-method explanatory sequential design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative phase employed a descriptive–correlational method to determine the participants' demographic profiles, perceived relevance of MEEM curriculum competencies, level of implementation of educational management practices, and challenges encountered in actual school settings. It also examined the relationships among curriculum relevance, competency implementation, and challenges experienced by school principals. The qualitative phase followed the quantitative analysis to explain and expand the statistical findings through participants' experiences, perspectives, and coping mechanisms. Integrating both approaches provided a more comprehensive understanding of how MEEM graduates applied their acquired competencies in educational leadership and management.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in public basic education institutions under the Department of Education (DepEd), Schools Division of Bohol, Philippines. The division comprises three congressional districts covering municipalities and schools where qualified MEEM graduates of Bohol Island State University–Main Campus were employed as school principals. The study covered principals assigned to schools in Congressional Districts 1 and 3, where eligible participants were identified. No qualified participants were included from Congressional District 2. The research setting provided an opportunity to examine the practical application of graduate-level educational management competencies within the administrative and instructional conditions of public schools in Bohol.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were full-fledged school principals employed in public basic education institutions in the Bohol Division who graduated from the MEEM program of Bohol Island State University–Main Campus between Academic Years 2005–2006 and 2019–2020. They had passed the National Assessment for School Heads (NASH), formerly the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) or Principals' Test, and were actively performing school leadership and management responsibilities. A total of 20 school principals participated in the quantitative phase, comprising 14 from Congressional District 1 and six from Congressional District 3. For the qualitative phase, 10 principals with substantial leadership experience and doctoral qualifications participated in follow-up interviews to provide deeper explanations of curriculum relevance, competency implementation, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who met the established eligibility criteria. Respondents were verified MEEM graduates of BISU–Main Campus, qualified school principals, and active educational leaders within the Bohol Division. The sample size was determined by the number of graduates who satisfied these requirements during the study. Twenty principals participated in the quantitative survey. For the qualitative phase, 10 participants were purposively selected based on their length of service as school principals, advanced educational qualifications, and relevant leadership experience. This sampling procedure ensured that participants possessed direct knowledge of the MEEM curriculum and its application in actual educational management practices.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of four parts. The first gathered demographic information, particularly the respondents' highest educational attainment and length of service as school principals after completing the MEEM program. The second assessed the perceived relevance of MEEM curriculum competencies, guided by the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) under DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2020 and aligned with CHED guidelines. The third measured the implementation of educational management practices across five domains: leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections. These domains were guided by the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) established by the Department of Education (DepEd, 2020). The fourth examined challenges encountered by graduates in applying their competencies in actual school settings. The questionnaire employed a four-point Likert scale for quantitative responses, while open-ended questions gathered additional qualitative information. The instrument underwent expert validation by a school principal and a supervisor to establish its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Interview guide questions were also used to obtain detailed accounts of participants' experiences and coping mechanisms.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering was conducted in three phases. During the preparatory phase, the researcher obtained approval from the Campus Director and Dean of Advanced Studies of Bohol Island State University–Main Campus and secured permission from the DepEd Schools Division Office of Bohol. The BISU–Main Campus Registrar was requested to provide the list of MEEM graduates from Academic Years 2005–2006 to 2019–2020. The research instrument was reviewed by experts, and their recommendations were incorporated before administration. During the quantitative phase, 20 qualified school principals completed the questionnaire through Google Forms. Participants were contacted through social media platforms to verify their identities and eligibility. The questionnaire explained the study's purpose and ethical considerations. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was maintained, and respondents were given sufficient time to complete the survey. For the qualitative phase, open-ended responses and follow-up interviews were collected from 10 purposively selected principals. Two interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams, two through audio recordings, and six through Facebook Messenger. These interviews explored participants' experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in applying MEEM curriculum competencies. Following data collection, quantitative responses were checked, encoded, and organized for statistical analysis. Qualitative responses were transcribed, reviewed, coded, and categorized into emerging themes. The qualitative findings were subsequently integrated with the quantitative results to explain and strengthen the interpretation of the study.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency and percentage were used to describe respondents' educational attainment and length of service. Weighted mean was employed to determine the perceived relevance of MEEM curriculum competencies, level of implementation of educational management practices, and challenges encountered by school principals. Standard deviation was computed to determine the variability of responses. A four-point interpretation scale was applied to the weighted means. For curriculum relevance, scores of 3.25–4.00 indicated Highly Relevant, 2.50–3.24 Relevant, 1.75–2.49 Slightly Relevant, and 1.00–1.74 Not Relevant. For competency implementation, the corresponding interpretations were Fully Implemented, Moderately Implemented, Partially Implemented, and Not Implemented. For challenges encountered, the categories were Highly Challenged, Moderately Challenged, Slightly Challenged, and Not Challenged. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (ρ) was used to determine the significant relationships between perceived curriculum relevance and competency implementation, implementation and challenges encountered, and curriculum relevance and challenges encountered. This nonparametric technique was selected because of the ordinal nature of the data. Statistical significance was determined using a 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis approach. The process involved familiarization with interview transcripts, generation of initial codes, identification of potential themes, review and refinement of themes, definition of final themes, and preparation of the qualitative report. This procedure identified recurring experiences, challenges, and coping strategies among school principals. The qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative results to explain observed relationships and provide contextual interpretations of curriculum relevance and implementation. The combined analyses served as the basis for developing an action plan to enhance the effectiveness of graduate educational management programs.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

3.1.1 Highest Educational Attainment

Of the 20 school principals, 17 (85%) had earned doctoral degrees, while three (15%) had completed doctoral units. These findings indicate that most respondents had pursued advanced academic qualifications beyond their MEEM degrees. The findings reflect the respondents' commitment to professional advancement and continuing education. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, advanced educational preparation strengthens the

knowledge and competencies needed for leadership responsibilities. The results also support the importance of graduate education in developing professional competence and effective school management.

3.1.2 Length of Service as School Principals

The respondents had varying lengths of service as school principals. Six (30%) had served for 11–15 years, five (25%) for 6–10 years, and another five (25%) for 16–20 years. Meanwhile, two (10%) had served for 0–5 years, and two (10%) for 21–25 years. Thus, most participants had substantial experience in school administration. These findings indicate that the respondents possessed considerable practical exposure to educational leadership, enabling them to assess the relevance and application of MEEM competencies. Their professional experience provides an important context for understanding how graduate education contributes to leadership practices, institutional decision-making, and school improvement.

3.2 Perceived Relevance of MEEM Curriculum Competencies

The MEEM curriculum competencies were rated Highly Relevant, with an overall weighted mean of 3.68. Establishing a clear school vision and mission received the highest rating (3.85), followed by organizational and administrative management skills (3.80). Strategic planning, research-based decision-making, and alignment of school goals with national priorities each obtained 3.75. Monitoring and evaluating curriculum implementation received the lowest mean (3.55), although it remained Highly Relevant. All 13 indicators received ratings within the highest interpretation category. These findings demonstrate the perceived alignment between the MEEM curriculum and the professional responsibilities of school principals. Transformational Leadership Theory, as discussed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), emphasizes vision-setting, motivation, and organizational improvement, providing a theoretical perspective for understanding the leadership competencies developed through the MEEM curriculum. The findings suggest that the curriculum provides relevant preparation for strategic leadership, evidence-based decision-making, resource management, and instructional supervision. However, the comparatively lower rating for curriculum monitoring indicates an area that may benefit from further practical emphasis.

3.3 Implementation of Educational Management Practices

3.3.1 Leading Strategically

The respondents rated their strategic leadership practices as Fully Implemented, with an overall weighted mean of 3.72. Strong implementation was observed in communicating the school's vision, mission, and core values, leading school improvement planning, and monitoring program effectiveness. Reviewing school policies and designing programs received comparatively lower ratings but remained within the Fully Implemented category. The findings reflect the practical application of strategic leadership competencies acquired through the MEEM program. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) emphasizes shared vision and innovation, while strategic management principles highlight the importance of aligning organizational actions with established goals. These perspectives support the importance of strategic planning, informed decision-making, and continuous school improvement.

3.3.2 Managing School Operations and Resources

The implementation of school operations and resource management obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.80, interpreted as Fully Implemented. The respondents demonstrated strong practices in managing school resources, implementing operational procedures, ensuring accountability, and supporting the efficient delivery of school programs. These results indicate that the respondents applied administrative and resource management competencies in their leadership responsibilities. These findings highlight the importance of organizational coordination, administrative accountability, and efficient utilization of available resources in strengthening school management practices. The results suggest that the MEEM curriculum provides relevant preparation for school governance, administrative efficiency, and resource management.

3.3.3 Focusing on Teaching and Learning

The implementation of practices related to teaching and learning received an overall weighted mean of 3.77, interpreted as Fully Implemented. Respondents demonstrated strong engagement in instructional supervision, monitoring teaching practices, supporting curriculum implementation, and promoting improvements in learning outcomes. These findings highlight the importance of instructional leadership in translating graduate competencies into school practices. Instructional Leadership Theory emphasizes the importance of establishing instructional goals, supervising teaching practices, and supporting curriculum implementation (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). These principles reinforce the role of school principals in improving instructional conditions and supporting effective teaching and learning. The results indicate that MEEM graduates recognize instructional supervision and teacher support as essential components of educational management.

3.3.4 Developing Self and Others

Developing Self and Others obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.86, interpreted as Fully Implemented. Respondents demonstrated strong practices in promoting professional development, mentoring teachers,

encouraging collaboration, and supporting continuous learning among school personnel. This domain received the second-highest overall implementation rating. These findings indicate that MEEM graduates prioritize professional growth and capacity building within their schools. He et al. (2024) found that principals' instructional leadership was associated with teachers' professional development, including the provision of professional learning opportunities. Watts (2023) also highlighted the value of mentoring and professional networks in supporting beginning principals. Although these studies examined different populations, they provide contemporary context for interpreting the respondents' reported emphasis on developing themselves and others.

3.3.5 Building Connections

Building Connections received the highest overall weighted mean of 3.88, interpreted as Fully Implemented. Respondents reported strong implementation of practices involving communication, stakeholder participation, school-community partnerships, and collaboration with parents and other educational partners. These findings emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement in effective school governance. Caro et al. (2024) examined challenges experienced by community stakeholders participating in school-based management in Biliran, while Pugado et al. (2025) described stakeholder participation difficulties encountered by school heads in rural Philippine settings. These studies offer recent context for understanding the importance of coordination and community involvement; they do not independently verify the implementation ratings reported by the present respondents. The results suggest that building connections is a perceived strength among the participating MEEM graduates.

3.3.6 Overall Implementation of Educational Management Practices

All five educational management domains were rated Fully Implemented. Building Connections obtained the highest mean (3.88), followed by Developing Self and Others (3.86), Managing School Operations and Resources (3.80), Focusing on Teaching and Learning (3.77), and Leading Strategically (3.72). These findings demonstrate consistently high self-reported implementation across the professional leadership domains. The results suggest that the MEEM curriculum provides competencies that graduates are able to apply across different aspects of school administration. The particularly high ratings for stakeholder engagement and professional development indicate strengths in collaborative leadership. Although strategic leadership obtained the lowest domain mean, its Fully Implemented rating reflects substantial application of strategic management practices.

3.4 Relationships Among Curriculum Relevance, Implementation, and Challenges

3.4.1 Relationship Between Curriculum Relevance and Implementation

Spearman's rho analysis showed a positive but statistically insignificant relationship between perceived MEEM curriculum relevance and implementation of educational management practices ($\rho = 0.305$, $p = 0.192$). Since the p-value exceeded the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The findings indicate that respondents' perceptions of curriculum relevance were not significantly associated with their reported implementation of educational management practices. Although the curriculum was rated Highly Relevant and its competencies were Fully Implemented, the results do not establish a statistically significant relationship between these variables. This suggests that perceived relevance and actual application should be considered distinct dimensions of graduate leadership preparation.

3.4.2 Relationship Between Implementation and Challenges Encountered

The relationship between implementation of educational management practices and challenges encountered was negligible and statistically insignificant ($\rho = 0.045$, $p = 0.850$). The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected. This finding indicates that the level of reported competency implementation was not significantly associated with the challenges experienced by school principals. Despite strong implementation ratings, respondents continued to encounter administrative, financial, and instructional difficulties. The result highlights the distinction between possessing leadership competencies and operating within challenging institutional conditions.

3.4.3 Relationship Between Curriculum Relevance and Challenges Encountered

The analysis revealed a weak negative but statistically insignificant relationship between perceived curriculum relevance and challenges encountered ($\rho = -0.189$, $p = 0.425$). Since the p-value exceeded 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The findings indicate that perceiving the MEEM curriculum as highly relevant was not significantly associated with experiencing fewer leadership challenges. The results suggest that school principals may recognize the value of their graduate preparation while still facing practical constraints in applying their competencies. Thus, curriculum relevance alone does not establish the extent of challenges encountered in actual school settings.

3.5 Preparation of MEEM Graduates for the Principals' Test and School Leadership

3.5.1 Alignment of MEEM Curriculum Competencies with Professional Standards

The qualitative findings revealed that the MEEM curriculum prepared graduates for the principals' examination by developing competencies aligned with the five domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). Participants emphasized that their graduate education strengthened their understanding of

strategic leadership, instructional supervision, school operations, professional development, and stakeholder engagement. They also reported that these competencies helped them perform their responsibilities in actual school settings. These findings reflect the importance of competency-based and standards-based education in preparing school leaders for professional assessment and administrative responsibilities. Transformational Leadership Theory further supports the development of leaders capable of guiding organizational improvement and influencing school performance. The alignment between curriculum competencies and professional standards indicates that the MEEM program provides preparation relevant to both the principals' examination and school leadership practice.

3.5.2 Integration of Leadership Theories and Practical Applications

The participants reported that the MEEM curriculum strengthened their leadership competencies through the integration of educational theories, management principles, and practical applications. They identified strategic planning, instructional leadership, curriculum management, human resource management, and data-driven decision-making as important competencies developed through the program. Respondents also emphasized the usefulness of applying theoretical knowledge to actual administrative responsibilities. These findings emphasize the importance of experiential learning, particularly the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical leadership experiences in educational management. Transformational Leadership Theory likewise highlights the importance of adaptability, innovation, and organizational improvement. The findings suggest that integrating theoretical preparation with practical leadership experiences supports graduates in applying their competencies to school governance, instructional management, and institutional decision-making.

3.6 Challenges Encountered in Applying MEEM Curriculum Competencies

3.6.1 Quantitative Assessment of Leadership Challenges

The respondents reported an overall weighted mean of 2.47 for challenges encountered, interpreted as Slightly Challenged. Insufficient budgets for school programs and projects received the highest mean (2.95), followed by limited time for classroom observations (2.90). Limited instructional resources, frequent changes in DepEd policies, and overwhelming administrative and reporting requirements each obtained 2.80. Meanwhile, limited community support (2.05), low stakeholder participation (2.10), and difficulties coordinating with local government units and nongovernmental organizations (2.15) were among the lowest-rated challenges. The findings indicate that school principals experienced greater difficulties in financial management, instructional supervision, and administrative workload than in stakeholder engagement. These challenges demonstrate that strong leadership preparation does not eliminate institutional and operational constraints. The results emphasize the importance of strengthening practical competencies in resource allocation, workload management, policy adaptation, and instructional monitoring.

3.6.2 Conflict Management and Diverse Stakeholder Needs

The qualitative findings revealed that MEEM graduates encountered difficulties in managing staff conflicts, coordinating school personnel, and responding to the diverse expectations of learners, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. Participants described the need to balance competing responsibilities while maintaining effective communication and harmonious working relationships within the school community. These findings are supported by Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), which emphasizes communication, collaboration, and adaptability in addressing organizational concerns. Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006) further highlights shared responsibility and collective problem-solving. The findings indicate that conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, and stakeholder management remain important areas for continuous leadership development.

3.6.3 Time Constraints, Administrative Workload, and Budget Limitations

Participants identified insufficient time for regular classroom observations, extensive administrative reporting requirements, and limited school budgets as major challenges. They explained that administrative duties, including budgeting, compliance, and documentation, reduced the time available for instructional supervision. Financial limitations also affected the implementation of school programs and professional development activities. These findings are consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) and Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006), which emphasize collaborative problem-solving and shared leadership responsibilities. The results suggest that school principals require effective workload distribution, resource management, and administrative prioritization to maintain instructional leadership while fulfilling operational responsibilities.

3.7 Coping Mechanisms of School Principals

3.7.1 Collaboration and Open Communication

The qualitative findings revealed that MEEM graduates addressed leadership challenges through collaboration, consultation, teamwork, and open communication. Participants reported seeking advice from colleagues, involving teachers and stakeholders in decision-making, maintaining transparent communication, and applying strategies acquired from their graduate education. Some also identified mentorship and spiritual guidance as

sources of support in addressing school concerns. These practices reflect Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) and Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006), which emphasize collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective responsibility. The findings indicate that participatory leadership enables principals to address organizational concerns while strengthening professional relationships and stakeholder trust.

3.7.2 Task Delegation and Policy Compliance

Participants also reported managing leadership challenges by prioritizing responsibilities, delegating tasks according to staff capabilities, and adhering to established school policies and DepEd orders. They emphasized accountability, sound decision-making, and alignment with the school's vision and mission. Task delegation was identified as a practical strategy for managing administrative workloads while empowering school personnel. These findings are supported by Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) and Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006), which emphasize empowerment, shared responsibilities, and organizational accountability. Ko (2024) further highlights the importance of collaboration, mentoring, and individualized support in transformational school leadership. The findings suggest that MEEM graduates apply collaborative and policy-oriented approaches to maintain operational efficiency and institutional accountability.

3.8 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

3.8.1 Curriculum Relevance and Professional Preparation

The quantitative findings showed that MEEM curriculum competencies were Highly Relevant, with an overall mean of 3.68. Qualitative responses supported this result by indicating that the curriculum prepared graduates for the principals' examination and strengthened their understanding of the five PPSSH domains. Participants also described how their acquired competencies contributed to leadership responsibilities in actual school settings. The integration of these findings indicates that the curriculum's perceived relevance is reflected in graduates' descriptions of their professional preparation. The qualitative accounts explain how leadership theories, educational management principles, and standards-based competencies contribute to examination readiness and practical school administration. However, these accounts do not establish a statistically significant relationship between perceived relevance and implementation.

3.8.2 Competency Implementation and Leadership Practices

The quantitative findings showed that all five educational management domains were Fully Implemented, with Building Connections (3.88) and Developing Self and Others (3.86) receiving the highest ratings. Qualitative findings similarly revealed that principals applied their competencies through stakeholder collaboration, instructional leadership, strategic planning, professional development, and policy-based decision-making. These converging findings suggest that MEEM graduates perceive their academic preparation as useful in performing their professional responsibilities. The qualitative accounts provide practical explanations for the high implementation ratings by describing how principals apply leadership competencies in school governance and daily management. The findings particularly emphasize collaborative leadership, professional growth, and community engagement.

3.8.3 Challenges and Leadership Adaptation

The quantitative findings indicated that respondents were Slightly Challenged overall, with a mean of 2.47. Budget limitations, insufficient time for classroom observations, administrative workload, and policy changes were the most prominent difficulties. Qualitative responses confirmed these concerns and further identified conflict management, diverse stakeholder expectations, and competing school responsibilities as leadership challenges. The integration of these findings demonstrates that school principals continue to experience operational difficulties despite reporting strong implementation of educational management competencies. Their reported coping mechanisms, including collaboration, task delegation, consultation, and adherence to policies, provide contextual explanations of how they respond to these challenges. These findings support the need for continued professional development and practical leadership training.

3.9 Proposed Action Plan for Enhancing the MEEM Curriculum

The combined findings provided the basis for a proposed action plan to strengthen the effectiveness of graduate programs in educational management. Although respondents rated the MEEM curriculum as Highly Relevant and their management practices as Fully Implemented, the study identified continuing challenges involving resource allocation, instructional supervision, administrative workload, conflict management, and stakeholder coordination. The findings also highlighted the importance of maintaining alignment between graduate curriculum competencies and the PPSSH domains. The proposed action plan emphasizes practice-based leadership development, experiential learning, mentoring, leadership simulations, strategic planning, resource management, conflict resolution, and continuous professional development. These proposed enhancements are intended to strengthen the application of graduate learning in actual school settings and support the development of competent, responsive, and collaborative educational leaders.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the Master in Education major in Educational Management (MEEM) curriculum is highly relevant and effectively implemented in preparing school principals for their leadership responsibilities. Its strong alignment with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) enables graduates to demonstrate strategic, goal-oriented, and evidence-based leadership in actual school settings. Despite challenges involving limited budgets, resource constraints, and varying levels of community support, principals effectively apply their acquired competencies in resource management, program prioritization, and stakeholder engagement. Overall, the MEEM curriculum bridges theory and practice by developing competent, ethical, and adaptive school leaders capable of sustaining effective school management despite contextual challenges.

The Department of Education (DepEd) should strengthen support for MEEM graduates through additional funding, targeted leadership training, and structured mentoring programs to address resource limitations and improve school management. School principals are encouraged to participate continuously in professional development activities, including leadership simulations, training workshops, and reflective practice sessions, to enhance their competencies in resource management, stakeholder engagement, and conflict resolution. Furthermore, local government units, parents, community partners, and other educational stakeholders should strengthen collaboration, resource sharing, and open communication with school leaders to support school programs, promote shared accountability, and improve educational outcomes.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The researcher obtained the necessary institutional permissions and endorsements from Bohol Island State University–Main Campus and the Department of Education Schools Division of Bohol before conducting the study. Participants were informed of the research objectives and procedures, given opportunities to ask questions, and voluntarily provided informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained, and all collected information was used exclusively for research purposes. The researcher acknowledges the participating institutions and school principals for their cooperation and support. Formal research ethics committee approval and a conflict-of-interest declaration were not explicitly reported in the manuscript.

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