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ELLN program as implemented in public elementary schools, moving from policy to classroom practice

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Abstract

This study investigated the challenges in implementing the Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy (ELLN) Program in public elementary schools in the Division of Tandag City during School Year 2025–2026. Anchored on Instructional Leadership, Human Capital, and Performance Management theories, the research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design integrating quantitative survey data and qualitative insights from focus group discussions. A total of 178 respondents comprising teachers, school heads, stakeholders, and the Division ELLN Coordinator participated in the study, while 15 purposively selected key informants provided in-depth qualitative perspectives.

Findings revealed that the ELLN Program was generally rated as "Fully Implemented" in terms of instructional strategies and learning materials, and "Well to Very Well Managed" across the functions of planning, organizing, directing, monitoring, and evaluation. However, significant implementation challenges were identified, particularly in resource allocation, availability of updated instructional materials, and teacher professional development. A notable training cascade gap emerged in Early Mathematics Skills, wherein all school heads were trained compared to only a small proportion of teachers. Moreover, monitoring practices were perceived as largely compliance-driven rather than instructional and supportive.

In response to these issues, the study proposed a Strategic Contextualized Management (SCM) Framework aimed at strengthening resource localization, enhancing teacher mentoring, and shifting supervision toward instructional coaching to improve program effectiveness and learner outcomes.

Keywords: ELLN Program; Implementation Challenges; Instructional Leadership; Resource Management; Mixed-Methods; Public Elementary Schools

1. Introduction

The Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy (ELLN) Program is a flagship initiative of the Department of Education (DepEd) designed to strengthen foundational competencies in reading, writing, and numeracy among kindergarten to Grade 3 learners. The program emphasizes evidence-based instructional strategies, teacher capacity-building, provision of learning materials, and systematic monitoring to ensure that early learners acquire essential skills that serve as a foundation for lifelong learning.

Despite strong national policy support, disparities in implementation persist across public elementary schools. Previous studies and field reports have documented recurring challenges such as insufficient instructional materials, limited professional development for teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and inconsistent instructional supervision. These

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issues contribute to a gap between policy intent and classroom reality, particularly in rural and resource-constrained contexts.

In the Division of Tandag City, similar concerns have been raised regarding the adequacy of resources, the effectiveness of training cascades, and the nature of program monitoring. While schools demonstrate general compliance with ELLN mandates, variations in quality of implementation suggest the need for a systematic investigation. This study therefore examined the challenges affecting the implementation of the ELLN Program in public elementary schools and proposed a management framework to enhance program effectiveness.

The study is anchored on Instructional Leadership Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Performance Management Theory, which collectively emphasize leadership, teacher competence, and data-driven monitoring as critical elements of successful program implementation.

(Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Department of Education, 2015; Karimi et al., 2022)

2. Methods

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase measured the level of ELLN implementation and management using a structured survey, followed by a qualitative phase through focus group discussions (FGDs) to explain and deepen understanding of the statistical results.

Data were collected from 178 respondents in 28 public elementary schools in the Division of Tandag City, Surigao del Sur. The sample included 121 teachers and school ELLN coordinators, 28 school heads, 28 stakeholders, and one Division ELLN Coordinator. Fifteen key informants were purposively selected for FGDs based on experience and involvement in the ELLN program.

A researcher-made questionnaire assessed (1) level of ELLN implementation in terms of strategies and learning materials and (2) management functions of planning, organizing, directing, monitoring, and evaluation. A semi-structured FGD guide was used to explore challenges in resource allocation, training, and supervision.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) and inferential tests (Pearson r and ANOVA). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework.

(Department of Education, 2015; Karimi et al., 2022)

3. Results

Profile of Respondents (Table 1).

3.1. Results (Tables with Interpretation)

3.1.1. Interpretation

The profile reveals a highly experienced and professionally trained leadership group, with 79% of school heads having master's units and 59% serving for 13 years or more. However, a critical training cascade gap is evident in Early Mathematics Skills: while 100% of school heads were trained, only 7% of teachers received the same training. This misalignment suggests that capacity-building mechanisms favor administrators rather than classroom implementers, potentially weakening numeracy instruction fidelity.

Note. FI = Fully Implemented; I = Implemented; MI = Moderately Implemented; SI = Slightly Implemented; NI = Not Implemented. Means are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not Implemented to 5 = Fully Implemented). (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Department of Education, 2015; Karimi et al., 2022) (see Table 2)

Table 1 Profile of Respondents in the ELLN Program

Profile Variable	School Heads (%)	Stakeholders (%)	Teachers (%)	Overall (%)
Female	41.00	82.00	88.00	79.00
Married	82.00	100.00	65.00	74.00
With Master's Units	79.00	0.00	54.00	49.00
13+ years in service	59.00	-	47.00	49.00
Attended ELLN Implementation	100.00	-	68.00	74.00
Attended Early Math Skills	100.00	-	7.00	25.00

Note. FI = Fully Implemented; I = Implemented; MI = Moderately Implemented; SI = Slightly Implemented; NI = Not Implemented. Means are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not Implemented to 5 = Fully Implemented).

3.1.2. Interpretation

All respondent groups rated instructional strategies as Fully Implemented (Grand Mean = 4.67). This indicates strong pedagogical alignment with ELLN principles such as phonics-based literacy, contextualized numeracy, and formative assessment. The consistently high ratings suggest that the program's instructional design is well embedded in daily classroom practice.

Table 2 Level of ELLN Implementation in Terms of Strategies

Indicators	School Heads	Stakeholders	Teachers	Grand Mean
Literacy strategies integrated	4.69	4.75	4.58	4.67
Contextualized numeracy	4.72	4.64	4.57	4.64
Child-centered activities	4.83	4.64	4.60	4.69
Differentiated instruction	4.76	4.82	4.56	4.71
Formative assessment	4.83	4.79	4.65	4.76

Note. FI = Fully Implemented; I = Implemented; MI = Moderately Implemented; SI = Slightly Implemented; NI = Not Implemented. Means are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not Implemented to 5 = Fully Implemented). (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Department of Education, 2015; Karimi et al., 2022) (see Table 3)

3.1.3. Interpretation

While learning materials were overall rated as Fully Implemented (Grand Mean = 4.52), teachers consistently gave lower ratings on updated guides (4.03) and funding for materials (3.86). This reveals a resource reality gap: administrators perceive adequacy, but teachers experience shortages and delayed distribution, compelling many to personally supplement materials.

Table 3 Level of ELLN Implementation in Terms of Learning Materials

Indicators	School Heads	Stakeholders	Teachers	Grand Mean
Age-appropriate materials	4.72	4.75	4.35	4.61
Numeracy manipulatives	4.79	4.86	4.40	4.68
Supplementary resources	4.62	4.79	4.28	4.56
Updated guides provided	4.52	4.75	4.03	4.43
Funds for materials	4.48	4.54	3.86	4.29

Note. FI = Fully Implemented; I = Implemented; MI = Moderately Implemented; SI = Slightly Implemented; NI = Not Implemented. Means are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not Implemented to 5 = Fully Implemented). (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Department of Education, 2015; Karimi et al., 2022) (see Table 4)

3.1.4. Interpretation

Planning was Very Well Managed (4.47), confirming strong alignment with school improvement plans. However, Organizing Resources (4.18), Monitoring (4.13), and Evaluation (4.14) were only Well Managed, indicating systemic constraints in budgeting, material distribution, and sustained instructional supervision. The pattern suggests a top-heavy management system: strong in planning and direction, but weaker in operational execution and feedback loops.

Table 4 Management of the ELLN Program in Public Elementary Schools

Management Function	School Heads	Stakeholders	Teachers	Grand Mean
Planning	4.53	4.63	4.26	4.47
Organizing	4.06	4.41	4.06	4.18
Directing	4.18	4.33	4.23	4.25
Monitoring	4.09	4.08	4.20	4.13
Evaluation	4.08	4.19	4.17	4.14

Note. FI = Fully Implemented; I = Implemented; MI = Moderately Implemented; SI = Slightly Implemented; NI = Not Implemented. Means are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not Implemented to 5 = Fully Implemented). (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Department of Education, 2015; Karimi et al., 2022) (see Table 5)

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that while the ELLN Program is generally implemented and managed at acceptable levels, systemic constraints limit its full effectiveness. Strong performance in planning reflects competent leadership and alignment with school improvement plans; however, weaknesses in organizing resources reveal structural limitations such as inadequate funding, delayed material distribution, and uneven access to updated instructional guides.

The identified training cascade gap in Early Mathematics Skills suggests that professional development mechanisms require strengthening. Although school heads are well-trained, many classroom teachers the primary implementers have limited exposure to specialized numeracy training, which may affect instructional quality and learner outcomes.

Monitoring practices were often perceived as compliance-oriented rather than developmental. Effective supervision should prioritize instructional coaching, reflective feedback, and continuous improvement rather than mere documentation or checklist compliance.

Overall, the results highlight a disconnect between policy design and ground-level execution, reinforcing the need for localized, context-sensitive management approaches that address resource, training, and supervision gaps.

(Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Karimi et al., 2022)

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the ELLN Program in Tandag City public elementary schools is generally well-implemented and managed; however, persistent challenges in resource allocation, teacher training, and instructional monitoring hinder optimal outcomes.

To address these issues, the study proposes a Strategic Contextualized Management (SCM) Framework that emphasizes localization of instructional materials, strengthened teacher mentoring, improved resource mobilization, and a shift from compliance-based monitoring to instructional coaching.

Implementing these recommendations is expected to enhance program fidelity, strengthen teacher capacity, and ultimately improve literacy and numeracy outcomes among early grade learners.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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