

Managing public island schools: Governance challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

This study made use of explanatory sequential mixed-method design in exploring the different governance challenges and opportunities in managing island schools. Specifically, this determined the degree of manifestations of island schools in the six domains of SBM Revised Self-Assessment Checklist, identified different challenges and opportunities, and the school's adaptive practices.

The accomplished SBM Self-Assessment Checklist of the nine island schools in Tabaco City was analyzed to determine the degree of manifestation. The results showed that both elementary and secondary schools are always manifesting the indicators under leadership, governance and accountability, human resource and team development. For curriculum and teaching and learning environment, common challenges were on low proficiency levels of learners on literacy and numeracy and bullying cases respectively. Under resource management and mobilization, both elementary and secondary schools are confronted with classroom shortage, lack of water and internet facilities.

The focus-group discussion with school heads, teachers and parents revealed several challenges like low proficiency levels, bullying and child abuse incidence, poor attendance during HRPTA meetings, retention of teachers, class suspensions due to inclement weather, lack of classrooms and other support services like library, guidance office, school clinic, water and internet facilities. These challenges are addressed through local and national learning interventions implementation along with the adoption of alternative delivery modalities to make education accessible and inclusive for island learners. Strong partnerships have also been noted which provide major support to island schools by providing varied assistance.

Keywords: School Management; Island Schools; Challenges and Opportunities; Explanatory sequential mixed-method design

1. Introduction

The varied roles of a school head fall under five domains as stated in DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2020 is known as the National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). These five are as follows: Leading Strategically, Managing School Operations and Resources, Focusing on Teaching and Learning, Developing Self and Others, and Building Connections. Wrapping these up, a school head must be a visionary, a manager, an instructional leader, a mentor and a connector.

In the performance of the varied and challenging roles of a school leader, the school context is a primary consideration (Department of Education 2020). School types range from small to very large schools depending on the number of enrollees and school personnel. They also differ in terms of geographical location and socioeconomic context. Urban schools often have better access to technology, facilities, and other services, unlike rural schools often found in the uplands and islands (Wang, 2013)¹.

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Schools also differ in terms of the curricular offerings. Aside from the basic curriculum, there are schools offering Special Program in the Arts, Sports, Journalism, Foreign Language as well as programs focusing on Science, Technology, and Engineering. The learning modalities offered by schools vary depending on learners' access, the capacities of schools and teachers, the environmental context, and the policies that need to be observed. Each school possesses unique characteristics that necessitate different governance styles.

This is precisely the intent of School-Based Management (SBM) institutionalized through RA 9155, where schools are empowered to make decisions responsive to their unique contexts. Its current implementation is guided by DepEd Order NO. 007, s. 2024 is known as the "Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Revised School-Based Management (SBM) System." Through this decentralization approach, authority and accountability are shared among school heads, teachers, learners, and the community, ensuring that schools are managed based on the localized contexts.

The researcher is one of the new school heads assigned to the biggest island school in the Schools Division Office of Tabaco City who came from the biggest mainland secondary school in the Bicol Region as a classroom teacher for almost three decades. More than the transition in the roles played was the big disparity she was confronted with between mainland and island schools along different aspects. This includes resources like electricity supply, connectivity, abilities and socio-economic status of learners, customs, frequent inclement weather due to different weather systems, and many others. So, as a school head, she needed to juggle the inherent challenge of being the school principal and the unique context of the school she is expected to manage and lead.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the different governance challenges and opportunities along six dimensions of SBM in managing public island schools in the Schools Division of Tabaco City for the School Year 2024-2025. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

- What is the degree of manifestation of island schools in the revised School-Based Management System Self-Assessment Checklist along the following domains:
 - Curriculum and Teaching
 - Learning Environment
 - Leadership
 - Governance and accountability
 - Human resources and team development
 - Finance, resource management, and mobilization
- What are the challenges and opportunities faced by island schools along the six SBM domains:
 - Curriculum and teaching
 - Learning environment
 - Leadership
 - Governance and accountability
 - Human resources and team development
 - Finance, resource management, and mobilization
- How do schools adapt to these identified challenges and opportunities?
- What recommendations can be formulated based on the findings of the study?

1.2. Scope and Delimitation

This study is delimited on the degree of manifestations of island schools along six key areas namely Curriculum and Teaching, Learning Environment, Leadership, Governance and Accountability, Human Resource and Team Development, Finance and Resource Mobilization as reflected in the SBM Self-Assessment Checklist. The results for elementary and secondary were interpreted separately to account for the distinct set of indicators applicable to each. Certain indicators were designed specifically for elementary schools, while others were relevant only to the secondary schools. It also investigated the different challenges and opportunities encountered by these island schools together with the ways they adapted to these.

The respondents of the study were the school heads of the Tabaco City Division assigned to the nine schools in San Miguel Island, Tabaco City, Albay, Philippines, six of which are elementary schools and three of which are secondary schools. But since the researcher is one among the three secondary school heads, there were only eight participants during the focus group discussion. This did not include school heads who had been previously assigned to the island but are now assigned to the mainland schools. These are the present school heads who have been assigned to the island for at least one year. School heads included the full-fledged principals, head teachers, and teachers-in-charge.

To validate responses of the school heads, teachers were also asked to participate in the study. Two teachers recommended by their school heads who have served in the school for at least two years were requested to be part of the focus group discussion. The president of the School Parent-Teachers' Association (SPTA) and the School Governance Council (SGC) elected co-chairpersons or their representatives also took part in the FGD with stakeholders.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

According to Tripura University (n.d.)², research methodology refers to a systematic and planned process of acquiring knowledge through scientific inquiry. It encompasses the selection of methods, techniques, and procedures that guide the overall design and implementation of a research project. Similarly, Lodico et al. (n.d.) defined research methodology as the theoretical framework that directs how research is conducted, including the strategies employed, such as inductive or deductive reasoning, the choice of qualitative or quantitative approaches, the formulation of hypotheses, and the techniques used for data analysis.

In this study, an explanatory sequential mixed-method design was used since this involved both quantitative and qualitative data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) define mixed-method research as "a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases of the research process. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone." Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) consider this type of research in combination with elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches for breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

2.2. Respondents of the Study

This research used purposive sampling techniques to determine the school head respondents. There are nine public schools in San Miguel Island, Tabaco City, six of which are elementary while three are secondary schools. However, the researcher is one among the secondary school heads; thus, there were only two from the secondary who joined in the focus-group discussion. School heads who are currently assigned to the island with more than one year of experience were the respondents of this study. However, in the analysis of the SBM checklist collected, all three secondary schools were included, considering that the checklist was accomplished not just by the school head but by a team composed of both internal and external stakeholders.

For teacher respondents, there were two teacher-respondents from each school, thus a total of eighteen. These teachers were also purposively selected based on the recommendations of their respective school heads. Their experience of being assigned to the island school ranges from eight months to seventeen years.

For the stakeholders, the current School-Parent Teacher Association (SPTA) President and the elected Co-Chairpersons of the School Governance Council (SGC) were the respondents. These people are among those who take active parts in most school activities year-round. There were eleven of them who attended the focus-group discussion.

2.3. Research Instrument

In this study, the main instrument used in data gathering was the School-Based Management (SBM) Self-Assessment Checklist. This provides a complete status for a school's continuous improvement along with the different school operations. Subsequently, separate focus group discussions were conducted: the first with the school heads, the second with the teacher-respondents, and the third with the stakeholders.

2.3.1. Checklist

The School-Based Management (SBM) Self-Assessment Checklist, which is Annex A of DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2024, known as the Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Revised School-Based Management System, was used to determine the degree of manifestations of the different schools on the island. This checklist gives a comprehensive understanding of the status of continuous improvement in the different areas of school operation. This checklist assessed the six SBM dimensions, each with corresponding indicators listed as observable school practices and attainable learning outcomes. The study used the checklist completed by the school for School Year 2024–2025 and submitted to the Schools Division Office during the first quarter of School Year 2025–2026. Numerical values were

assigned for each degree. The scale was interpreted as follows: 1 – Not Yet Manifested, 2 – Rarely Manifested, 3 – Frequently Manifested, and 4 – Always Manifested.

2.3.2. Focus-Group Discussion

In this study, the researcher conducted a focus group discussion in three separate groups. The nine schools in the entire San Miguel Island are divided into clusters known as Cluster 6 and 7. Cluster 6 is composed of four elementary schools and one secondary school found in the northern portion of the island, while Cluster 7 is composed of two elementary and two secondary schools found in the southern part. Considering the distance of the nine schools, the FGD was done in two batches with three subgroups. The first batch was with the school heads, teachers and stakeholders of Cluster 7, and the second was with the school heads, teachers, and stakeholders of Cluster 6. The focus of the discussion was on the different challenges, opportunities and how they adapt to the identified challenges. The lowest and highest scoring indicators along the six domains in the checklist were used as a guide during the FGD.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Degree of Manifestation of Elementary and Secondary Island Schools on Curriculum and Teaching

SBM Indicator	Degree of Manifestation						Over -all Rank
	Elementary			Secondary			
	Mean	Desc ription	Rank	Mean	Description	Rank	
1. Grade 3 learners achieve the proficiency level for each cluster of early language, literacy, and numeracy skills	2.33	RM	6.0	Not Applicable			6.0
2. Grade 6, 10 and 12 learners achieve the proficiency level in all 21 st century skills and core learning areas in the National Achievement Test (NAT)	2.50	FM	5.0	1.67	RM	6.0	7.0
3. School-based ALS learners attain certification as elementary and junior high school completers	Not Applicable			Not Applicable			
4. Teachers prepare contextualized learning materials responsive to the needs of the learners	3.33	FM	3.0	3.67	AM	4.5	4.5
5. Teachers conduct remediation activities to address learning gaps in reading and comprehension, science and technology, and mathematics	3.33	FM	3.0	3.67	AM	4.5	4.5
6. Teachers integrate topics promoting peace and DepEd core values	3.33	FM	3.0	4.00	AM	2.0	3.0
7. The school conducts test item analysis to inform its teaching and learning process	3.50	AM	1.0	4.00	AM	2.0	2.0
8. The school engages local industries to strengthen its TLE-TVL course offerings	Not Applicable			4.00	AM	2.0	1.0
Over-all Mean	3.05	FM		3.50	AM		

Legend: AM - Always Manifested; RM - Rarely Manifested; FM - Frequently Manifested; NM - Not Yet Manifested

Table 1 shows that both elementary and secondary island schools are not yet achieving the proficiency level along foundational and core competencies, which are consistent with the findings of EDCOM 2 (2026)³. The report indicates a decline in students' proficiency levels from the elementary grades to senior high school, as reflected in Indicator 2 of Table 1.

Out of the eight indicators under the first dimension, the elementary group has the highest degree of manifestation in indicator 7, which is on the conduct of item analysis to inform the teaching-learning process. On the other hand, the secondary group has the highest degree of manifestation in indicator 8, which is on the engagement with local industries to strengthen TVL work immersion. Meanwhile, both elementary and secondary schools got the lowest degree of manifestation on proficiency levels of learners.

Table 2 Degree of Manifestation of Elementary and Secondary Island Schools on Learning Environment

SBM Indicator	Degree of Manifestation						Over-all Rank
	Elementary			Secondary			
	Mean	Description	Rank	Mean	Description	Rank	
1. The school has zero bullying incidence	3.33	FM	7.0	3.00	FM	8.0	8.0
2. The school has zero child abuse incidence	3.33	FM	7.0	2.67	FM	9.0	9.0
3. The school has reduced its drop-out incidence	3.83	AM	2.0	3.33	FM	5.5	4.0
4. The school conducts culture-sensitive activities	3.50	AM	4.0	3.67	AM	2.5	3.0
5. The school provides access to learning experiences for the disadvantaged, OSYs, and adult learners	3.83	AM	2.0	3.67	AM	2.5	2.0
6. The school has a functional school-based ALS program	Not Applicable			Not Applicable			
7. The school has a functional child-protection committee	3.33	FM	7.0	3.33	FM	5.5	6.0
8. The school has a functional DRRM plan	3.83	AM	2.0	4.00	AM	1.0	1.0
9. The school has a functional support mechanism for mental wellness	3.33	FM	7.0	3.33	FM	5.5	6.0
10. The school has special education- and PWD-friendly facilities	3.33	FM	7.0	3.33	FM	5.5	6.0
Overall Mean	3.52	AM		3.37	FM		

Table 2 shows the degree of manifestations of elementary and secondary island schools on the learning environment. The table shows that both elementary and secondary schools are either frequently or always manifesting the indicators under the second domain. It means that these schools have low bullying, child abuse, and drop-out incidence, and that they conduct culture-sensitive activities. Access is provided to disadvantaged learners, out-of-school youths, and adult learners. Also, their child-protection committee, DRRM plan, and support mechanism for mental wellness are functional.

However, it is important to note that the lowest mean score in this domain is obtained by the secondary group, which is on incidences of child abuse, followed by that of bullying. This means that secondary schools are more confronted with bullying and child abuse cases as compared to elementary schools. Torino and Compass (2024)³ and EDCOM 2 (2024) showed the same results, that while bullying is prevalent at both the elementary and secondary levels, it is more impactful and reported at the secondary level.

Table 2 also shows that island schools got the highest degree of manifestation on having functional DRRM plans and providing access to disadvantaged, out-of-school youths and adult learners. The lowest degree of manifestation is having zero cases of child abuse and bullying cases.

Table 3 Degree of Manifestation of Elementary and Secondary Island Schools on Leadership

SBM Indicator	Degree of Manifestation						Over-all Rank
	Elementary			Secondary			
	Mean	Description	Rank	Mean	Description	Rank	
1. The school develops a strategic plan	3.83	AM	2.5	4.00	AM	1.5	1.0
2. The school has a functional school-community planning team	3.67	AM	4.0	4.00	AM	1.5	2.5
3. The school has a functional Supreme Student Government/Supreme Pupil Government	4.00	AM	1.0	3.67	AM	3.5	2.5
4. The school innovates in its provision of frontline services to stakeholders	3.83	AM	2.5	3.67	AM	3.5	3.0
Overall Mean	3.83	AM		3.84	AM		

The overall means of 3.83 and 3.84, as presented in Table 3 for the elementary and secondary groups, respectively, showed almost the same degree of manifestation along leadership. This basically means that leadership practices include strategic planning in collaboration with key stakeholders, forming a dynamic team propelling the school towards its goal. The table also showed that elementary schools got the highest degree of manifestation on having a functional Supreme Pupil Government, while the secondary schools got the highest in having a strategic plan and functional school planning team.

Table 4 Degree of Manifestation of Elementary and Secondary Island Schools on Governance and Accountability

SBM Indicator	Degree of Manifestation						Over-all Rank
	Elementary			Secondary			
	Mean	Description	Rank	Mean	Description	Rank	
1. The school's strategic plan is operationalized through an implementation plan	3.33	FM	6	4.00	AM	3.5	6
2. The school has a functional School Governance Council (SGC)	3.83	AM	3.5	4.00	AM	3.5	3.5
3. The school has a functional Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)	4.00	AM	1.5	4.00	AM	3.5	1.5
4. The school collaborates with stakeholders and other schools in strengthening partnerships	3.83	AM	3.5	4.00	AM	3.5	3.5
5. The school monitors and evaluates its programs, projects, and activities	4.00	AM	1.5	4.00	AM	3.5	1.5
6. The school maintains an average rating of satisfactory from its internal and external stakeholders	3.50	AM	5	4.00	AM	3.5	5
Overall Mean	3.75	AM		4.00	AM	3.5	

Table 4 presents a consistent manifestation of all the indicators of both the elementary and secondary schools, with the secondary group having perfect scores in the six indicators. This means that all island schools can implement their strategic plan created collaboratively and that the programs, projects, and activities are monitored.

Table 5 Degree of Manifestation of Elementary and Secondary Island Schools in the Six Dimensions

Domain	Elementary Schools		Secondary Schools	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
1. Curriculum and Teaching	3.05	FM	3.50	AM
2. Learning Environment	3.52	AM	3.37	FM
3. Leadership	3.83	AM	3.84	AM
4. Governance and Accountability	3.75	AM	4.00	AM
5. Human Resource and Team Development	3.83	AM	3.81	AM
6. Finance and Resources Management and Mobilization	3.43	FM	3.24	FM
Overall Mean	3.57	AM	3.63	AM

Table 5 presents the mean scores of both elementary and secondary schools in the six domains of the SBM Self-Assessment Checklist. Both elementary and secondary schools have achieved a rating of “Always Manifested” in most of the domains; however, they both only attained “Frequently Manifested” on Finance and Resources Management and Mobilization. This was because of the absence of functional computer laboratories/classrooms and libraries.

4. Conclusion

Following comprehensive investigation and rigorous analysis, the study arrived at the following conclusions:

- Island schools are generally always manifesting the different indicators of the SBM Self-Assessment Checklist.
 - Elementary schools frequently manifested the different indicators on curriculum and teaching while the secondary schools always manifested.
 - For learning environment, indicators were always manifested by elementary schools but just frequently manifested by secondary schools.
 - Both elementary and secondary schools have always manifested the indicators under leadership.
 - Both elementary and secondary schools have always manifested the indicators under governance and accountability.
 - Both elementary and secondary schools have always manifested the indicators under human resource and team development.
 - Frequent manifestations were demonstrated by both elementary and secondary schools.
- There were several identified challenges and opportunities in the different domains as follows:
 - Low proficiency level was the major challenge encountered by both elementary and secondary schools. This was mainly attributed to absenteeism, lack of parental support, lack of interest and focus and frequent class suspensions. As to opportunities, contextualization of learning materials, integration of peace and values, adjustments of classroom of instructions based on item analysis were among the practices done to improve curriculum implementation.
 - There are cases of bullying and child abuse in the island school but were settled and dealt with by the school's child protection committee in partnership with concerned government agencies. Meanwhile, dropout cases are more prevalent in secondary school due to poverty, teenage pregnancy, family obligations among others. Island schools have functional child protection committee, established referral system to partner agencies and retention efforts to reduce dropouts.
 - Poor attendance of stakeholders and disparity between allocated fund during strategic planning and actual expenses were the issues raised. Parents and teachers affirmed that island school heads employed consultative and collaborative approaches in managing the school.

- The rotation of school heads resulting in a frequent change of leadership was raised by the parents. Poor attendance of parents during meetings was also raised by teachers. On the positive side, partnerships of island schools with local, even up to international level, were evident. This provides a major support system for the island schools.
- Inability of mainland teachers to report to school during inclement weather and school personnel's retention were the major concerns of island schools. These affect learning continuity and efficiency in the delivery of services. For personnel's growth and development, needs-based LAC sessions are conducted, promotions are facilitated, and rewards and recognition are established.
- Shortage of classrooms and lack of water and internet facilities are the common complaints among island schools. There is an existing electric facility, but the electric supply is very unstable. Support services like those of a library, computer laboratories, guidance office and school clinic are also not available in most of the island schools. But strong partnerships with stakeholders augment school's resources and the utilization of the school MOOE is maximized.
- Island schools are confronted with several challenges but employ adaptive practices to overcome these.
 - To address low proficiency levels, aside from the national learning intervention, island schools adapt school-initiated literacy and numeracy interventions. These are complemented by remedial programs initiated by barangay councils, private organizations and the city government.
 - Cases of child abuse and bullying are handled by ensuring that the school's CPC is functional and in collaboration with partner agencies. Advocacy campaigns are implemented both at the school and division levels in collaboration with some other government agencies. Dropouts are reduced through school-initiated interventions and other alternative delivery modalities like the Open High School Program (OHSP).
 - Island school heads employ collaborative and consultative management approaches.
 - Strong partnerships with stakeholders are sustained through a reward and recognition system. The same strategy is adapted to improve parents' attendance.
 - Schools adapt contingency plans or shift to distance learning modalities on days teachers cannot report to school due to inclement weather. For schools with issues on personnel retention, induction programs are conducted regularly and gradually, localization is implemented.
 - Island schools make use of temporary learning spaces (TLS), merge classes, divide classrooms to accommodate two classes, utilize classrooms for multi-purposes, and others. Partnerships with external stakeholders provided some schools basic necessities like sustainable water systems, internet connections, construction materials, and others.
- Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address challenges faced by island school:
 - Intervention programs aimed at improving learner proficiency must adopt a multisectoral approach, involving not just the school personnel but parents, volunteer-tutors and other stakeholders as well.
 - Implementation of the child protection policy and the functionality of the Child Protection Committee must be regularly checked to reduce bullying and child abuse incidences.
 - Employ a collaborative and consultative management approach.
 - Establish stakeholder recognition programs and maintain open communication channels to preserve long-term partnerships for school improvement.
 - There must be a stricter implementation of the localization law in hiring both teaching and non-teaching personnel assigned to the island schools to improve personnel retention and class disruptions due to inclement weather.
 - Priority allocation of funds for classroom construction must be advocated at both the local and the national levels. It is preferable that classrooms be constructed to be typhoon and disaster-resilient.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

I declare that I have no conflicts of interest related to this research. I have no personal or financial relationships that could influence my work.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study

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