

Original Research Article

School Culture and Effectiveness

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: May 21, 2020

Accepted: June 25, 2020

Volume: 2

Issue: 2

KEYWORDS

School Culture, Effectiveness, Descriptive Correlational, Institutional Practices, National Achievement Test, Bohol and Cebu Philippines

ABSTRACT

A review of school effectiveness literature shows that different levels of school-level achievement are linked to differences in school characteristics and especially to school culture. This study aimed to determine the school culture and its relation to school effectiveness of the selected well performing and less performing junior high schools of the divisions of Bohol and Cebu City in the academic year 2016-2017. Based on results, both well performing and less performing schools share about the same perception on their school culture, particularly pertaining the various dimensions of the curricular elements, curricular decision-making, and school-based leadership categories. This could be attributed to the fact that they all belong to the same structural system, that is, the public-school system under the monitorship of the Department of Education. Although there may not be much difference in their perceptions on their school effectiveness involving institutional practices, student performance in NAT, as well as dropout and retention rates, less performing schools can always learn from the well performing schools especially on areas where they significantly achieved better, such as student performance in the NAT, as well as in their retention rates, among others.

Introduction

Schools today continue to face the challenge to educate all students to higher academic standards. The No Child Left Behind Act holds public schools in all states of America accountable for increasing student achievement. The act calls for sweeping reforms in education that aimed greater achievement with all students to be proficient in all their academics and skills. In the Philippines, the EFA Plan (Education for All) is a holistic program of reforms to achieve an improved quality of basic education for every Filipino. Its goal is basic competencies for all that will bring about functional literacy – cognitive, affective and behavioral which enable individuals to live and work as human persons; develop their potentials; make critical and informed decisions; and function effectively in society within the context of their environment and that of the wider community in order to improve the quality of their lives and that of the society.

The core business of schools then is to ensure that the school environment for every student provides challenging, interesting, and satisfying work (Schlechty, 2003). School leaders are all the more tasked and challenged in creating and sustaining a positive school culture, which is at the heart of increasing student achievement.

Currently, the efforts to improve or reform schools have focused on promoting student achievement in terms of preparing students for the modern work force. The means by which the government and the academe are promoting this wave of reforms is centered on standards-based education which focuses primarily on restructuring the educational organization.

In the past three school years, the Department of Education – Bohol Division reported the consistent decrease of the students' performance in the National Achievement Test (NAT) in the entire division (Chatto, 2016). Such student

performance calls for administrators, principals and teachers' attention to review or reflect on school systems. Assessing or reassessing the culture of a school and the importance of continuing embedded professional development is today's schools challenge to become more effective in the delivery of a quality education (Blankstein, 2004). Creating and sustaining a positive school culture is vital to realize the academic goals. The culture of the school is the key to its improvement. Principals must assess the culture of the school and strive to strengthen it for better outcome one of which is improving student achievement (Kline, 2004).

Having been in the private schools for the past two decades and presently working with the public-school system, the researcher is motivated to dig deeper on school culture as well as school effectiveness. It is challenging on the part of the administrators and teachers to know the culture of their own school because it will pave the way to adopting new and better ways to address the needs of students. The results of this study may remind all stakeholders that positive culture is the primary tool with which a school leader fosters change and that a healthy school culture fosters continuous improvement in student achievement. Thus, this study.

Literature Review

Culture, in simplest term, is described as the people's beliefs and perceptions of their workplace. Culture is a term that tries to capture the informal, implicit, often unconscious side of any human organization. Schein (2002) defines culture as a pattern of group learned assumptions that are taught to new members. These assumptions include the current and historical decisions that are made within a group to solve problems. These decisions are based on institutional heroes and traditional ways of handling decisions and situations within a school setting. A strong positive culture enables people to feel better about what they do, so they work harder (Deal & Kennedy, 2008).

A school's culture is characterized by deeply rooted traditions, values, and beliefs, some of which are common across schools and some of which are unique and embedded in a particular school's history. Culture informs the ways in which "things get done around here" and, just as importantly, frames how change efforts are perceived.

Literature on culture places emphasis on change, suggesting that an effective organization may be defined as one which creates a culture that inspires its members to embrace change and pursue improvements. This change has the capacity to make people proactive and creative problem-solvers. Organizational leaders must realize the power of culture within an organization which is considered a critical element, vital to successfully improving the teaching and learning in schools (Fullan, 2003).

Making schools more effective requires building and reshaping the hidden and taken-for-granted rules that govern day-to-day behavior. School leaders need to be aware that schools need a culture that encourages productivity, high morale, confidence, and commitment. This type of culture can grow through human interaction and knowledge of the stakeholders. Principals, in particular, must also acknowledge and nurture the rituals, traditions, ceremonies and symbols that already express and reinforce positive school culture (Stolp, 2004).

Griffith (2009) asserts, "Future studies should continue to direct assessment of principal behaviors in relation to specific school processes (e.g., the principal's facilitation of collegiality and trust among staff, statement of the school mission, and influence on teacher expectations) for student learning and better performance". Further, a more comprehensive and coherent conceptualization of the link between school culture and school effectiveness would help principals manage schools more effectively (Griffith, 2009).

On the other hand, Edmonds (2001) greatly emphasized that effective schools have well defined goals and purposes, a clear sense of mission, and the active presence of purposing. Duttweiler (2010) synthesized more recent literature on effective schools into the following characteristics: emphasizing student-centeredness and promoting student - learning, offering academically-rich programs, positive school climate, fostering collegial interaction, extensive staff development program, practicing shared leadership, promoting creative problem solving, and active involvement of parents and the community.

This research work on school culture and school effectiveness is supported with Adam's School Culture Model (2013), Gruenert's Collaborative Leadership Theory (2003), and School Effectiveness Theory of Marzano (2012).

The School Culture Model of Adams (2013) conceptualized schools as complex and dynamic organizations with specific process and structural dimensions whose interactions yield different levels of overall effectiveness in various schools. Because schools are viewed as complex organizations, a multidimensional approach to investigating linkages among various school culture and school effectiveness variables in middle schools provides a process-oriented approach for understanding and describing overall school effectiveness. This model also emphasizes the interaction among various curricular processes and structural dimensions with school effectiveness indices.

The multiple, reciprocal relationships among school input variables, process and structural dimensions, and the various indices of school effectiveness implies that school culture is a multidimensional construct. Because of the exploratory nature of the model framework and their various levels of incorporation in state level school effectiveness accountability ratings, the three indices of school effectiveness represented in the model; such as school organizational effectiveness, student achievement, school holding power, were considered to be reasonable measures to guide any initial exploration of possible relationships among schools and their effectiveness.

The model consists of the three key components of: (1) school inputs, (2) a school culture independent variable set, and (3) school outputs. The model assumes that school culture represents a complex, multidimensional set of process and structural variables whose interrelationships serve to link model inputs with model outcomes in unique ways in different schools.

Furthermore, this model suggests that the effects of physical, fiscal, capital, and human resources (inputs) on school outcomes are the results of the interactions among various macro-structural, micro-structural, and unseen structural elements (school organizational structures) with several identified dimensions such as *school curricular elements, curricular decision-making, and school-based leadership*. Each dimension has three sub-dimensions which are clearly identified in the SC inventory checklist used in this study.

The second theory, which is Gruenert's Collaborative Leadership Theory, describes the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with school teachers and staff. Gruenert (2005) maintained that principals empower teachers to become leaders through collaboration. The principal is responsible for sustaining the cohesiveness of the stakeholders. Community and staff members want to feel that they are part of something. Failing to establish opportunities for teachers to be leaders can create an empty professional relationship between teachers and school leaders (Marshall, 2005).

The lead teacher, master teacher, and program coordinator, for example, carry out a wide range of responsibilities for the school. Block (2003) discussed the notion of an ideal social space that was conducive to solving even the most perplexing of organizational problems. Leadership is the critical element in fostering the critical discussions necessary to build the notion of a social space in schools. The principal must exert strong leadership to ensure to muster leaders' in their leaders. (Schlechty, 2002).

Effective collaborative leadership stresses the importance of the principal, as the instructional leader, working with the teachers to improve student success (Schlechty, 2002). The concept of this leadership entails leaders and followers in the same organization changing roles as the situation warrants. Harris (2003) posited that school leaders' skills in facing challenging circumstances are important, especially in problem solving and decision - making. Collaborative leadership is essential in building distributive leadership in schools (Spillane & Sheerer, 2004). The principal giving up power is a key element in fostering collaborative leadership.

Empowerment is the process that encourages teachers to help the school achieve its primary goal of improving the work teachers give to students. Having parents, teachers, and students as part of the decision-making process is new to some principals, but vital to the success of implementing a school's mission statement. Teachers can be further empowered by increasing their autonomy and obtaining support from the principal for their efforts. Principals can also encourage innovation and risk taking by teachers. Innovation and risk taking are essential components for continuous improvement. School leaders act as members of teams rather than sole decision makers. Principals must believe that through participation in decision-making teachers will have more sense of buy-in or ownership of those decisions (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Principals create environments that provide teachers with enabling experiences that lead to empowerment. In schools,

enabling experiences may focus on roles and responsibilities, the culture of the school, the way problems are identified and solved, or the structure of the organization. Participating in the shared decision-making process is an example of empowerment. Principals create a culture where teachers participate in decisions involving budgets, teacher selection, scheduling, and curriculum. A *school culture* that encourages teachers to participate in decisions fosters honest and open communication and risk taking (Short & Greer, 2002).

Principals can hamper the ability of the teachers to share in the decision-making process by seeking the latter's opinion and then making the decision themselves. Principals and stakeholders can benefit from collaborative leadership within the structure of a school leadership team. A functional school leadership team fosters *a culture of collaborative leadership*.

The leadership team is the focal point for school-wide communication and decision-making about learning and instruction. School leaders put learning at the center of everything they do; student learning first, then everyone else's learning in support of student learning (Glickman, 2002). The leadership team coordinates and integrates all activities that occur within the school building and between school and community organizations. The leadership team can identify the critical learning challenges students are facing school-wide and find effective ways to address them. Leadership teams are implementing methods that include stakeholders' input in identifying a clear direction and focus (Marino, 2007). Serving on the leadership team allows teachers to feel empowered, to assume new roles and responsibilities, try new ideas and take risks, and assess openly the results. Marino (2007) stated that, "By establishing a community of leaders, administrators can collectively harness the talent of a diverse group of individuals and benefit from their multiple perspectives". Fullan (2006) suggested that successful schools have cultures that encourage teachers working collaboratively. As teachers collaborate, they develop stronger instructional strategies, and these strategies ultimately enhance student achievement.

The principal plays a pivotal role in fostering a trusting, respectful atmosphere within the school. Day's (2005) study found that trust, drawing upon and constructing social capital within the school and between the school and its local community is essential. A trusting environment is optimal for collaborative leadership. The quality of a principal's leadership depends upon the quality of his or her relationships with the entire school community (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Principals must model the cooperative behaviors they expect from teachers. Integrity and fairness should guide the principal in collaborating with teachers, and trust and fairness are essential for healthy collaborative leadership to take place. Providing a caring, trusting work environment and many opportunities for participation and shared decision making are two of the ways that organizations enlist people's commitment and involvement at all levels. "Schools are places where principals, teachers, students, and parents all lead" (Blankstein, 2004).

Collaborative school cultures emphasize hard work, a strong and common commitment, dedication, collective responsibility, and a special sense of pride (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2006). Collaborative cultures also raise student achievement and facilitate the commitment to change and improvement (Fullan & Hargreaves).

Another theory on which this study is anchored on is the ***School Effectiveness Theory*** by Marzano (2012). According to him, there are five levels of school effectiveness. Movement of a school through these levels is intended to produce a system that has "high reliability" regarding each level for which the school has successfully demonstrated it satisfies the criterion indicators (i.e., lagging indicators). In effect, when a school has met the criterion indicators for a specific level, it consistently monitors those indicators and makes immediate corrections when school performance falls below acceptable levels.

The leading indicators for each level can be considered more qualitative evidence that a school is at or approaching a specific level. The criterion indicators (lagging indicators) for a given level can be considered the minimally acceptable levels of performance that must be satisfied for a school to be deemed as reliable for that specific level. The five levels are as follows: *first*, a safe and orderly environment that supports cooperation and collaboration; *second*, an instructional framework that develops and maintains effective instruction in every classroom; *third*, a guaranteed and viable curriculum focused on enhancing student learning, *fourth*, is standard-referenced system of reporting student progress and *fifth*, a competency-based system that ensures student mastery of content.

As a school moves through the levels, it becomes reliable relative to more variables and becomes more transformational in its approach to educating its students. At the highest level (i.e., level 5) a school has made a dramatic shift in the way it "does

business” and can guarantee that every student has mastered specific content necessary for success in the 21st century. For Hannan and Freeman (2012), for them a natural measure of the effectiveness of an organization is how well it achieves its goals, indicated by measuring performance. Furthermore, they used the concept of organizational ecology to argue that organizational effectiveness depends on the environment in which the organization operates. An organization that delivers adequate performance in a challenging environment may be more effective than an organization that performs well without encountering problems.

Three other equally important theories provided the foundations for this research: Giddens’ structuration theory, Senge’s concept of learning organizations, and Schein’s process of identifying the different elements of culture in an organization. Giddens as cited by Thrupp (2001) combines the concern for social structure and the concern for human agency in structuration theory. This duality of structure—humans and social norms—illustrates his concept of looking at the process of change in society. Humans develop social norms but by virtue of their interactions with each other change those norms. This change is brought about gradually as humans interact, collaborate, and solve problems. The once-established societal norms are altered through the interactions of the people who originally established these norms. Thus, change occurs. Senge’s work (2000), *The Fifth Discipline*, discusses organizations and how each institution should become a learning organization. He identifies five disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, team learning, and, most importantly, systems thinking.

Schein (2002) provides a way to analyze culture by identifying three different levels. The first level comprises the artifacts of an organization, the traditions and practices that are visible to the observer. The second level includes values that are concepts the group supports strongly and have implemented into their daily routines. Assumptions, the third level, are the deep beliefs that the members of an organization hold; these beliefs influence the actions of the members of the organization.

The Department of Education is the principal government agency responsible for education and manpower development. It continually pursues the mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution ensuring peoples’ right to education. Article XIV, Sec.1 of the constitution provides that the state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. It states that everybody has a right to be educated. So, one must fight for it. It’s the government’s obligation to address it, because education is the basis of democracy. Government should prioritize education, not debts payments (Ismael, 2008).

In the year 2002, former Department of Education Sec. Raul Roco ordered the implementation of the Basic Education Curriculum. The goal of this new curriculum was to provide the school age population and the young adults with skills, knowledge and values to become caring, self-reliant, productive and patriotic citizens.

The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 envisions a curriculum that shall promote the holistic growth of the Filipino learners and enable them to acquire the core competencies in literacy and numeric, critical thinking and learning skills and develop desirable values. The curriculum shall be flexible to meet the learning needs of a diverse studentry, and is relevant to their immediate environment and social and cultural realities.

The Department of Education is given a great task to fulfill the aforementioned goals. It involves great effort, time and initiatives for the success of the said goals. It is an endless responsibility. Commitment and dedication to work is highly recommended to the entire members of the education ministry most especially the principals who directly run the school and the teachers who are personally in contact with the learners. With the redirections of the curriculum, schools are more challenged to create a system, an environment, a culture that would ensure they are effective in molding young people become learners with the 21st century skills.

Improvement efforts were likely in schools where positive professional cultures had norms, values, and beliefs that reinforced a strong educational mission. Culture was a key factor in determining whether improvement was possible (Deal & Peterson, 2000). Schein (2002) wrote “the bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will damage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead.”

Educational researchers agree that, as the leaders of individual schools, principals impact the school’s culture

(Sergiovanni,2005). School culture can be modified by leadership and the decision-making process of the leadership. A principal can positively or negatively affect the school culture (Bandura, 1993).

Shaping the culture within the school is a focus of principals. Leadership traits continue to be studied so that principals can strive for a more complete understanding of how to mold a positive culture within their schools for an ultimate gain in student performance. School culture has been positively tied to student achievement, so it is imperative that school leaders or principals foster a positive school culture and practice effective decision making (Sackney, 2008).

School culture can be controlled and modified. A principal's leadership style can enhance, encourage and nurture a positive school culture. Most leaders draw from multiple leadership styles and recognize that the ethic of caring has become increasingly important. Leaders who are positive, responsive, committed, persuasive, effective, and inspiring are capable of enhancing culture within a school (Bandura, 1993).

Principals who are assertive instructional leaders promote high expectations for students by continuously focusing on instruction and emphasizing the importance of academics and student achievement. They must be excellent role models with a well- articulated mission statement (Sackney, 2008).

Culture influences everything that happens in a school. Deal and Peterson (2002) go as far as to argue that school culture is a key factor in determining whether improvement in school is at all possible. The more understood, accepted, and cohesive the culture of a school, the better able it is to move toward ideals it holds and objectives it wishes to pursue. Such is the power of culture that any effort to improve school effectiveness must take it first into account (Barth, 2001). Philips and Wagner (2003) explain that focusing on improving school culture assure positive results as the educators themselves become learners, and what they learn spell the difference whether their students learn or not.

School effectiveness researches have shown that school culture is related to student achievement (Sackney,2008). A study by Sweetland (2000) demonstrated that, after socioeconomic status, school culture had a more powerful effect on student achievement than any other variable. Teachers who felt empowered and part of a team, and who felt supported by their principals and colleagues, enjoyed a sense of collective efficacy and higher achievement scores were the result. Administrators and teachers with a shared belief in the power to produce effects through collective action promote higher levels of academic progress.

A study by Brookover (2003) investigated the relationships among a variety of school-level climate and school culture variables and mean school achievement in a random sample of Michigan elementary schools. The study concluded that some aspects of school social environment clearly make a difference in academic achievement of schools. A favorable climate and positive culture with high academic standards is a necessary condition for high achievement. The social-psychological climate is an integral component of school culture and student achievement.

This study also established that the school composition does not necessarily determine school climate. Sackney (2008) wrote that school culture influences psychological processes and achievement and is subject to change as stakeholders' perceptions change. Teachers who are empowered professionals encourage positive student achievement. Teachers working and participating in a school culture high in collective efficacy promoted higher levels of student achievement (Bandura, 1993).

Weber (2001) studied third graders in four inner-city schools in New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and Los Angeles. These schools were selected because their reading achievement scores were at or above the national average. He concluded that schools do make a contribution to student achievement, and itemized common elements found in these successful programs as strong leadership, continuous evaluation of pupil progress, and an environment conducive to learning. Murnane's (2001) literature review of effective school's research in the 1980s arrived at a similar conclusion of "schools matter, and more specifically, that the key element of schools that matters the most are the people". Strong administrative leadership can make a difference in student learning. These findings have clear implications for school leaders as well.

A review of school effectiveness literature shows that different levels of school- level achievement are linked to differences in school characteristics and especially to school culture (Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 2009). Furthermore, researchers have noted that organizational structural arrangements and the set of cultural elements within an organization are central to

effectiveness and productivity (Kelley & Peterson, 2002). For example, Brown et al. (2003) developed an initial framework for a conceptual definition of curricular culture as a school-level characteristic impacting overall school effectiveness.

Many of the early school effectiveness studies have emphasized differences between effective and ineffective schools. Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) noted that “such school effectiveness studies are post hoc comparisons; in fact, very few of these studies made a priori predictions about what organizational properties were related to school effectiveness or student achievement, and that remains the case today. Even fewer studies describe the processes and mechanisms that link school properties to student achievement, that is, provide a theoretical explanation of why certain school characteristics promote achievement.

Furthermore, there has been a recent emphasis on measuring school effectiveness through the monitoring of student outcomes to develop comprehensive school accountability systems. These systems use standardized test scores to measure student progress and achievement to make comparisons among schools. Heck (2000) reported “school effectiveness research, in part, has been a driving force behind such [school accountability system] efforts, determining that school structure and the quality of educational processes can make a difference in student achievement”. Because of this, it is important for researchers and practitioners alike to understand the relationships among these school level variables and school effectiveness.

Because of the lack of clarity within the literature in synthesizing the specific factors involved in student achievement, a different investigative approach to describing these complex relationships among school-based culture and school effectiveness variables may prove beneficial. Researchers have called for and used multiple perspective approaches to explain educational policy phenomena (Cibulka, 2000). Early school effectiveness studies suggested that elements of curricular culture and school organizational structures comprised a checklist of important characteristics describing effective schools (Kelley & Finnigan, 2003).

Spillane et al. (2004) developed a multidimensional leadership model suggesting that “leadership activity at the level of the school, rather than at the level of individual teachers or small group of leaders, is the appropriate unit of analysis in studying leadership practice”. Similarly, “principals can enhance teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions and other aspects of school capacity by connecting teachers to external expertise, by creating internal structures, and by establishing trust relations with school staff” (Youngs & King, 2002).

Other studies have demonstrated substantial differences in the leadership stance involving how school leaders enact their roles in schools with strong and weak organizational structures (Louis et al., 2006 & Simon, 2007), suggesting the manner in which various school-level dimensions interact among each other in various school settings may differ. Because of this, Spillane et al. (2004) suggest a new approach focusing on the “interdependencies between leadership activities or practices rather than focusing chiefly on social interaction among individuals; that is a focus on the interactions and situations simultaneously that constitute leadership practice. As a result, a goal of this study was to build on the integrative conceptual leadership model developed by Spillane et al. (2004) by linking previous school effectiveness studies together, furthering the concept of school culture and how separate dimensions of school culture interact with various school effectiveness indices within and between different school contexts.

Researchers have identified separately various elements of curricular decision making and school-based leadership whose multiple interactions provide a more complete understanding of curricular leadership in schools, yet no studies exist synthesizing these elements together as part of a multidimensional conceptualization attempting to provide a more clear explanation of CL/SE linkages (Ferrin, Landeros, & Reck, 2001).

Furthermore, Potter, Reynolds, and Chapman (2002) urge researchers and practitioners to carefully consider any potential interrelationships among these school characteristics and any mediating factors such as state accountability systems that may contribute to school effectiveness.

Teachers and principals must balance their knowledge with contextual demands during the curricular decision making process (Randi & Corno, 2008). For example, Justice et al. (2002) demonstrate that using student performance data to drive curricular and instructional decision making increases student achievement, thereby improving overall school effectiveness.

Similarly, Walpole et al. (2004) assert that “teachers must be supported by an unremitting administrative effort to attain coordination among key components of curricular reform”; that is the level of collaborative rapport among the various curricular stakeholders in a school impacts the effectiveness of curricular decision making (Peterson, 2002; Remillard, 1999). Furthermore, principals can elevate the collective responsibility for student learning among teachers and thereby elevate levels of stakeholder autonomy by distributing influence over curricular decisions (Spillane et al., 2001).

Different styles of school-based leadership impact teacher participation in the curricular decision-making process (Silin & Schwartz, 2003). However, few studies have conceptualized or empirically examined connections among school-based leadership and school organizational structures that may influence curricular decision making (Youngs & King, 2002). Reeves (2000) said that it is important for teachers and principals to maximize communicative flow by balancing their knowledge with contextual demands during the curricular decision-making process (Peterson, 2002). A significant outcome of effective curricular decision making includes professional development targets designed to help teachers better deliver the curriculum (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Similarly, Peterson (2002) purports that “a strong culture in a professional development program is likely to build commitment and identification with the program and its mission [and that] it seems reasonable to assume that effective programs will have both well designed structures and strong cultures”.

Stolp (2004) in his article *Leadership for School Culture* said that successful leaders have learned to view their organizations’ environment in a holistic way. This wide-angle view is what the concept of school culture offers principals and other leaders. It gives them a broader framework for understanding difficult problems and complex relationships within the school. By deepening their understanding of school culture, these leaders will be better equipped to shape the values, beliefs, and attitudes necessary to promote a stable and nurturing learning environment

The study of Aquino (2013) posited that the most effective change in school culture happens when principals, teachers, and students model the values and beliefs important to the institution. The actions of the principal are noticed and interpreted by others as “what is important.” A principal who acts with care and concern for others is more likely to develop a school culture with similar values. Likewise, the principal who has little time for others places an implicit stamp of approval on selfish behaviors and attitudes.

Deal and Peterson (2000) suggested that principals should work to develop shared visions—rooted in history, values, beliefs—of what the school should be, hire compatible staff, face conflict rather than avoid it, and use story-telling to illustrate shared values. Finally, and most important, principals must nurture the traditions, ceremonies, rituals, and symbols that already express and reinforce positive school culture.

Moreover, Aquino (2013) said on previous research of school effectiveness, teachers’ commitment emerges as a significant factor towards school effectiveness. Several researchers consistently have shown that teachers’ commitment has positive relationship with organizational performance. Two types of commitment regularly discussed in school effectiveness research (i.e. individual commitment and organizational commitment). Organizational commitment can be described as the teachers’ effort towards the school. These efforts will have a positive impact on students.

In the study of Monsanto (2000) on *Understanding the School Culture of Public Secondary Schools in the National Capital Region, Philippines*, she concluded that the public school system exhibits a generic type of school culture and there is a need to revisit its school cultures to look into how it could improve on the following aspects: a) a set of shared core beliefs and values reflected in the school’s vision mission and philosophy, committing the school and everyone in it to high standards and expectations (academic, professional, and moral-ethical) and giving primacy to student excellence in academics and character while seeking to promote the integral human development, b) professional commitment, collegiality, and collaboration on the part of the teachers, administrators, and staff, c) the teachers’ sense of efficacy to affect student learning d) a learning and work environment that is demanding and supportive, that is basically defined by the school’s physical environment, its organizational structures, systems, and policies and the kind of professional and personal relationships existing among the school’s constituents, e) a strong sense of community, f) shared leadership and accountability.

The aforementioned studies helped in the deeper understanding or meaningful interpretations of findings of this own study. Furthermore, these related studies gave more dimensions and broader perspectives in the discussion about an important concern in today's time which is on *school culture*. This particular endeavor attempted to know the school culture of the identified well performing and less performing schools in terms of NAT results as well as with their dropouts & retention rates and their institutional practices as reflected in the results of the Index of Perceived School Effectiveness (IPSE).

Moreover, the research work tried to explore school effectiveness using the Index of Perceived School Effectiveness instrument which deals on institutional practices. This idea of assessing culture based on the three dimensions such as *curricular element, curricular decision-making and school-based leadership* is using the School Culture Model of Adams.

As school effectiveness were explored in this study, the IPSE (Index of Perceived School Effectiveness) instrument was used which was originally used by Hoy (2009). Student performance in the National Achievement Test, and the school holding power as seen or reflected in the school's dropout and retention rates for the past three school years, 2012-2013 to 2014-2015, were part in measuring such effectiveness of schools.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is a descriptive type of research. This research design was employed in this investigation with the aid of the standardized assessment tools for gathering data from the two groups of research respondents: the two well performing schools as well as two less performing schools from both Bohol and Cebu schools divisions. The said instruments were used to evaluate the present situation in the said schools – that is, school culture based on the three dimensions such as curricular elements, curricular decision-making and school-based leadership. Descriptive data on school effectiveness was also explored with the used of IPSE (Index of Perceived School Effectiveness) instrument.

Research Environment

This study was conducted in the province of Bohol and in Cebu City. Two schools from both places were identified and chosen based on the records of National Achievement Test (NAT) results for the past three school years which were obtained through the offices of Bohol Division and Cebu City Division.

Research Participants

Respondents of the study were school administrators, teachers and students from the four identified schools of Cebu City and Bohol province. All school administrators and teachers of the identified schools answered the questionnaire. For the student-respondents, only the Grade 10 students were asked to answer the survey questionnaires since they have been in their school for about four years and they are assumed to be more knowledgeable of the ins and outs, the system or the life of the school.

Results and Discussions

1. These are the respondents' perception on school culture in terms of the following components:
 - 1.1. **curricular element.** The overall composite mean (from Tables 2-4) of 1.43 and 1.60 for performing schools and non-performing schools respectively, suggests that there is a positive culture in both groups of schools as far as curricular elements are concerned. It appears that regardless of the school performance profile, whether performing or not, administrators, teachers and students tend to have a generally favorable impression of their curriculum, specifically on the dimensions of developmental appropriateness, rigorous standard, and qualitative instructional methods.
 - 1.2. **curricular decision-making.** Both groups of schools, performing and non-performing, yielded a *strongly agree* qualitative description from their overall composite means (from Tables 5-7) of 1.44 and 1.72. Results reveal that collaborative rapport is high in both groups which could mean that generally, students, teachers and administrators foster good relations between and among each other. Moreover, curricular decision making in terms of autonomy isn't an issue in these schools. However, the performing schools are more data-driven in making curricular decisions as they obtained a mean of greater value than the other group.
 - 1.3. **school-based leadership.** The overall composite mean (from Tables 8-10) of 1.46 and 1.70 for performing schools and non-performing schools respectively, reveal that both groups of respondents value professional development, with faculty and staff working to attain it, and at the same time see their heads as professional

- individuals. Moreover, the performing and the non-performing schools have a high regard on their principals; they see them as inspiring skillful negotiators. Furthermore, all respondents acknowledge that communication is indeed highly visible in their respective schools.
2. These are the indices used to determine the extent of the respondents' school effectiveness:
 - 2.1. **institutional practices.** The results revealed that recognition of academic achievement is evident in both performing and non-performing schools. It was also disclosed that both school groups acknowledge the lack of both *quantity* and *quality* of products and services produced in their respective schools, but only to a limited extent.
 - 2.2. **student performance in NAT.** Performing schools have really commendable NAT results compared to those of the non-performing schools (see Appendix C).
 - 2.3. **drop out and retention rates.** Both school groups have incurred similar dropout rates. Although the administrators, teachers and students from both two groups of schools have observed the efforts and initiatives, dropouts are imminent in both performing schools and non-performing ones. On the other hand, in terms of retention rates, performing schools have greater retention rates compared to the non-performing schools.
 3. The null hypothesis was accepted; respondents from both groups of schools have perceived similarly on school culture. School culture is about the processes and interactions within existing organizational structures. The result also implies that the administrators, teachers and students from both two groups of schools have seen similar effort and valued commitment in the implementation of organizational life and leadership.
 4. School effectiveness between performing and non-performing schools:
 - 4.1. **school effectiveness in terms of organization.** The results revealed that the computed t-value of 7.810 is greater than the critical value which is equal to 1.960; this resulted to the rejection the null hypothesis. The respondents from the performing schools have different perceptions compared to the non-performing schools. They have different experiences on how well they are in terms of organization, particularly on how they define their own functions as stakeholders.
 - 4.2. **school effectiveness in terms of NAT results.** The results revealed that the computed t-value of 13.781 is greater than the critical value which is equal to 1.960. The null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the performing schools and the non-performing schools do differ in their school effectiveness in terms of NAT results. Performing schools have really commendable NAT results compared to those of the non-performing schools.
 - 4.3. **school effectiveness in terms of dropout rates.** The results revealed that the computed t-value of 1.526 is lesser than the critical value which is equal to 1.960. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that both school groups have incurred similar dropout rates.
 - 4.4. **school effectiveness in terms of retention rates.** The computed t-value, 12.912 greater than the critical value which is equal to 1.960. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. It means that the two groups of schools do differ in this particular dimension ---- performing schools have greater retention rates compared to the non-performing schools.

Conclusion

Both performing and non-performing schools share about the same perception on their school culture, particularly pertaining the various dimensions of the curricular elements, curricular decision-making, and school-based leadership categories. This could be attributed to the fact that they all belong to the same structural system, that is, the public school system under the monitory of the Department of Education. Although there may not be much difference in their perceptions on their school effectiveness involving institutional practices, student performance in NAT, as well as dropout and retention rates, non-performing schools can always learn from the performing schools especially on areas where they significantly achieved better, such as student performance in the NAT, as well as in their retention rates, among others.

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