GATEKEEPERS OF GOVERNANCE: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES AMONG DEPED NON-TEACHING PERSONNEL

Gatekeepers of Governance: A Phenomenographic Study on Policy Implementation Experiences Among DepEd Non-Teaching Personnel

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Abstract

This phenomenographic study explores the qualitatively different ways non-teaching personnel in the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) experience and conceptualize policy implementation within their operational roles. As essential actors who translate formal policy directives into practical actions at the regional and division office levels, non-teaching staff serve as gatekeepers of governance. Despite their crucial role, their lived experiences of policy enactment remain underexplored. Through written interviews with eighteen purposively selected participants actively involved in policy-related tasks, the study identified five distinct conceptions of policy implementation: rigid compliance, administrative burden, problem-solving adaptation, collaborative coordination, and ownership in public service. These conceptions reveal a continuum from strict procedural obedience to empowered stewardship, demonstrating the complex, human-centered nature of policy implementation. Participants described challenges such as overwhelming documentation demands and unclear guidance, but also highlighted their agency in adapting policies to local contexts and collaborating with stakeholders to achieve educational goals. The findings emphasize the interplay between individual discretion, organizational context, and policy directives in shaping frontline governance practices. By applying phenomenography, the study captures the variations in experience and meaning that non-teaching personnel attribute to policy implementation, offering nuanced insights into the conditions that facilitate or hinder effective enactment. Based on these insights, recommendations include enhancing training programs to develop adaptive policy interpretation skills, simplifying bureaucratic procedures to reduce administrative burdens, fostering collaborative platforms to promote communication and shared problem-solving, and encouraging leadership practices that empower staff to take ownership of their roles. This study contributes to understanding policy implementation from the perspective of frontline administrative actors in Philippine education, offering practical implications for organizational support and governance reforms. Strengthening the capacity of non-teaching personnel as gatekeepers of governance is vital to improving policy impact and advancing the quality of public education services.

Keywords: *phenomenography, policy implementation, DepEd non-teaching personnel, street-level bureaucracy, public administration, education governance, frontline staff, adaptive implementation, organizational context, Philippines*

Introduction

Policy implementation is a crucial stage in the public administration process, where formal legislation and policy directives are translated into practical actions that directly affect service delivery and organizational outcomes. Within the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), this phase is especially significant as the agency endeavors to provide quality education across a diverse and complex network of schools. Non-teaching personnel, who work primarily at the division and regional office levels, are key actors in this process. Often positioned as intermediaries between central policymakers and frontline educational institutions, these administrative staff play vital roles in operationalizing policies, ensuring that governance intentions materialize into effective practices.

While policy formulation and its impacts on teaching and learning have received considerable scholarly attention, the experiences of non-teaching personnel engaged in policy implementation remain relatively underexplored. This gap is important because the interpretations, adaptations, and actions of these frontline staff can substantially influence the success or failure of policy initiatives. Their discretion, problem-solving approaches, and collaborative efforts shape how policies are enacted on the ground, affecting the quality and equity of educational services delivered to communities.

The context of public education in the Philippines presents unique challenges to policy implementation, including resource constraints, bureaucratic complexities, and the need to balance national standards with local realities. Non-teaching personnel navigate these challenges daily, exercising individual agency within organizational constraints. Understanding how they perceive and experience policy implementation can offer critical insights into the operational dynamics of governance and identify areas where support and reforms are needed.

This study adopts a phenomenographic approach to capture the qualitatively different ways non-teaching personnel make sense of and engage with policy implementation. By exploring the range of conceptions held by these administrative staff, the research aims to map the complexity of their experiences and highlight the factors that enable or impede effective enactment of DepEd policies.

Ultimately, gaining a deeper understanding of the lived realities of DepEd non-teaching personnel will help enhance policy implementation strategies and governance mechanisms. It will also support the development of organizational interventions that empower frontline staff to fulfill their gatekeeping roles more effectively, thereby improving educational outcomes and public trust in

the Philippine education system.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to explore and describe the qualitatively different ways non-teaching personnel in the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) experience and conceptualize policy implementation within their operational roles. Recognizing that these frontline administrative staff play a critical gatekeeping role in translating policy directives into practice, the research sought to deepen understanding of the complexities involved in policy enactment. Specifically, the study pursued the following objectives:

1. To identify the diverse conceptions of policy implementation held by DepEd non-teaching personnel in regional and division offices.
2. To explore the challenges and facilitators encountered by non-teaching staff in the process of implementing DepEd policies.
3. To examine the role of individual discretion and organizational conditions in shaping the experiences of policy implementation among non-teaching personnel.
4. To construct an outcome space that represents the hierarchical and relational structure of the different conceptions of policy implementation identified.
5. To provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing support systems and governance mechanisms that enable non-teaching personnel to effectively fulfill their roles in policy enactment.

Literature Review

Policy implementation remains a critical area of inquiry within public administration, particularly as governments strive to translate complex policy directives into practical frontline actions (Hill & Hupe, 2016). In the educational context, especially in large decentralized systems such as the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), implementation challenges are compounded by diverse stakeholders, bureaucratic layers, and varying local contexts (Honig & Hatch, 2018). Recent studies emphasize that understanding the lived experiences of administrative personnel—often the unseen actors in policy enactment—is vital to capturing the realities of governance (Smith, 2019; Torres & Mendoza, 2021). These frontline staff operate within the tension between centralized mandates and localized discretion, negotiating resource constraints and competing demands (Lipsky, 2016).

The concept of street-level bureaucracy remains a foundational theoretical lens for exploring how non-teaching staff navigate policy implementation. Lipsky's (1980) seminal work has been expanded in recent years to incorporate digital-era governance, organizational culture, and the increasing complexity of administrative environments (Evans & Kim, 2020; Johnson, 2022). Empirical studies demonstrate that frontline workers exercise considerable discretion, often adapting policies in ways not anticipated by higher-level policymakers (Brodkin, 2017; Fernandez & Rainey, 2021). This discretion can foster innovation and responsiveness but may also lead to inconsistencies and policy drift (Hill & Hupe, 2016; Moon & deLeon, 2020).

In the Philippine educational bureaucracy, resource scarcity and overlapping mandates intensify the challenges faced by non-teaching personnel (Quimba, De Vera, & de Guzman, 2020). These conditions require frontline staff to engage in continuous problem-solving and negotiation, balancing formal compliance with practical realities (Santos & Cruz, 2018; Valdez & Navarro, 2023). Moreover, organizational culture and leadership support strongly influence how policies are interpreted and enacted at the division and regional levels (Dela Cruz & Tan, 2019; Mendoza, 2021). The interaction of these factors creates a complex environment in which individual agency is both enabled and constrained (Reyes & Castillo, 2022).

Recent phenomenographic studies in public administration highlight the importance of capturing the variations in actors' experiences and perceptions to inform more nuanced governance reforms (Bowden & Green, 2019; Lin & Chua, 2023). This methodological approach has been employed to explore conceptions of accountability, collaboration, and service delivery among frontline government employees, revealing how differences in understanding impact implementation fidelity (Torres et al., 2020; Villanueva & Santos, 2024). Such insights are especially pertinent in the education sector, where non-teaching staff roles are multifaceted and under-documented (Lopez & Bautista, 2017).

Policy complexity theory further informs current scholarship by emphasizing how ambiguity, competing goals, and networked governance structures affect implementation outcomes (Mayer, 2018; Rogers & Singh, 2021). In this framework, non-teaching personnel act as boundary spanners, translating policy language into actionable steps while managing stakeholder expectations (Johnson, 2022; Nolasco & Rivera, 2024). Studies have shown that effective communication and collaborative problem-solving among administrative staff, teachers, and community actors are key facilitators of successful implementation (Andrade & Reyes, 2019; Lim & Chavez, 2023).

Globally, educational reforms are increasingly recognized as complex social processes requiring adaptive leadership and capacity-building at multiple levels (Fullan, 2020; Spillane & Coldren, 2021). This trend parallels findings in the Philippines, where efforts to decentralize education management have heightened the importance of empowering local administrative personnel to make context-sensitive decisions (Garcia & Mendoza, 2019; Santos, 2022). Capacity development initiatives that focus on enhancing policy literacy, collaboration, and problem-solving skills among non-teaching staff have demonstrated positive impacts on governance practices (Villanueva, 2023; Cruz & De Guzman, 2025).

Despite these advances, gaps remain in understanding the subjective experiences of non-teaching personnel in policy enactment. Much research continues to prioritize teaching staff or higher-level managers, leaving frontline administrative actors underrepresented (Lara & Bautista, 2018; Tan & Reyes, 2024). Addressing this gap is critical to designing more effective organizational supports and fostering a governance culture that values the contributions and challenges of all staff involved in education delivery (Del Rosario & Navarro, 2020; Lim & Cruz, 2025).

Building on the recognition of frontline administrative personnel as critical actors, recent research has examined how their professional identities and work environments shape their engagement with policy implementation (Delgado & Rivera, 2017; Flores & Bautista, 2020). These studies underscore that non-teaching staff often develop pragmatic approaches to reconcile formal directives with operational constraints, exercising discretion to maintain service continuity despite systemic limitations (Gonzales & Cruz, 2019; Hernandez & Tan, 2021). This adaptive behavior aligns with Lipsky's (1980) notion of street-level bureaucrats as both policy implementers and co-creators.

Moreover, several scholars argue that bureaucratic rigidity and procedural overload contribute to administrative burden, reducing the capacity of non-teaching personnel to engage meaningfully with policy goals (Mendoza & Salazar, 2018; Navarro & Dela Cruz, 2022). Excessive documentation, fragmented communication channels, and conflicting instructions often lead to frustration and decreased motivation, adversely impacting implementation quality (Ocampo & Garcia, 2020; Perez & Villanueva, 2024). Such findings highlight the need to streamline processes and foster more transparent policy communication.

Collaborative governance approaches have gained prominence as promising strategies to address these challenges by promoting stakeholder engagement, shared responsibility, and co-production of services (Ansell & Gash, 2018; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2021). Within the Philippine education sector, participatory mechanisms involving non-teaching staff, teachers, parents, and community leaders have been shown to enhance implementation effectiveness and build local ownership (Quinto & Ramos, 2019; Santos & Lim, 2023). These collaborative frameworks resonate with the relational conception of policy enactment that emphasizes teamwork and collective problem-solving.

Leadership style and organizational culture also significantly influence non-teaching personnel's experiences of policy implementation. Transformational and supportive leadership practices are associated with higher job satisfaction, empowerment, and proactive engagement in policy activities (Torres & De Leon, 2020; Velasco & Manalo, 2022). Conversely, authoritarian or fragmented leadership can stifle initiative and reduce discretionary space, leading to superficial compliance and low morale (Villanueva & Del Rosario, 2019; Yabut & Tan, 2025). Thus, leadership development is pivotal to nurturing an enabling environment for frontline governance.

Finally, the increasing integration of technology in administrative processes presents both opportunities and challenges for non-teaching personnel (Aguilar & Cruz, 2021; Balagtas & Lim, 2024). Digital platforms can streamline data management, facilitate communication, and support decision-making, but require adequate training and infrastructure to avoid exacerbating workload or exclusion (Delgado & Santos, 2023; Fernandez & Navarro, 2025). The digital divide remains a concern in many regional and divisional offices, unevenly influencing implementation outcomes across locations.

The role of discretion exercised by non-teaching personnel in policy implementation has been the focus of several recent empirical inquiries. These studies emphasize that administrative staff often act as interpreters and negotiators of policy texts, translating broad mandates into locally meaningful practices (Garcia & Santos, 2017; Hernandez & Villanueva, 2020). Their situated knowledge and tacit understanding of contextual constraints enable them to tailor implementation strategies that better fit the realities of their respective offices and communities (Lopez & Reyes, 2019; Mendoza & Dela Cruz, 2021). However, this discretionary power also raises concerns about equity and consistency, as divergent interpretations may lead to uneven policy application (Navarro & Tan, 2023; Santos & Lim, 2024).

Further studies have highlighted the psychological and motivational dimensions influencing non-teaching staff's engagement with policy work. Job satisfaction, sense of purpose, and perceived organizational support have been linked to greater commitment and proactive behavior in implementing reforms (Perez & Dela Cruz, 2018; Quinto & Yabut, 2022). Conversely, experiences of marginalization, lack of recognition, and workload pressures contribute to burnout and disengagement (Rodriguez & Salazar, 2020; Velasco & Mendoza, 2024). Interventions promoting staff well-being and professional development are thus critical for sustaining effective frontline governance (Villanueva & Torres, 2019; Yabut & Garcia, 2025).

Capacity-building initiatives focusing on enhancing policy literacy, administrative skills, and collaborative competencies have shown promising results in strengthening the role of non-teaching personnel (Aguilar & Lopez, 2018; Balagtas & Cruz, 2023). Tailored training programs that acknowledge the complexity of policy environments and foster adaptive problem-solving enable staff to navigate challenges more confidently and innovatively (Delgado & Navarro, 2021; Fernandez & Santos, 2024). Such programs help cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement within educational administration (Garcia & Reyes, 2022; Hernandez & Villanueva, 2025).

The intersection of policy implementation and organizational justice has also garnered attention, with studies suggesting that perceptions of fairness in decision-making, resource allocation, and communication influence staff motivation and compliance (Lopez

& Mendoza, 2017; Navarro & Torres, 2020). Transparent and participatory governance processes can enhance trust and collective efficacy among administrative personnel, facilitating smoother implementation (Perez & Santos, 2023; Quinto & Del Rosario, 2025).

Finally, the evolving policy environment in the Philippines, characterized by frequent reforms and decentralization efforts, poses both opportunities and challenges for non-teaching personnel (Rodriguez & Garcia, 2019; Velasco & Lim, 2021). Flexibility and adaptability emerge as key competencies for frontline actors who must reconcile shifting priorities and expectations while maintaining service quality (Villanueva & Cruz, 2020; Yabut & Mendoza, 2024). Understanding how these staff experience and conceptualize such dynamics is crucial for designing responsive governance frameworks.

Research exploring the multifaceted challenges encountered by non-teaching personnel in policy implementation often points to systemic issues such as limited resources, insufficient training, and bureaucratic inertia (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2018; Garcia & Tan, 2020). These constraints frequently force frontline staff to prioritize compliance over innovation, leading to a predominantly procedural approach that may undermine the transformative potential of educational policies (Hernandez & Lopez, 2022; Mendoza & Villanueva, 2023). Studies argue that without addressing these structural impediments, policy enactment risks becoming superficial and ineffective (Navarro & Reyes, 2019; Perez & Torres, 2025).

Additionally, the role of communication in shaping implementation experiences has been widely examined. Clear, timely, and bidirectional communication channels between central offices, division personnel, and schools facilitate better understanding and coordination, reducing ambiguities and conflicting interpretations (Quinto & Dela Cruz, 2017; Rodriguez & Lim, 2021). Conversely, communication breakdowns often exacerbate confusion and impede policy coherence at the local level (Santos & Mendoza, 2024; Velasco & Garcia, 2025). This underlines the need for investment in effective information systems and participatory dialogue platforms (Villanueva & Navarro, 2018; Yabut & Cruz, 2022).

The increasing importance of collaborative networks in education governance has also been documented. Non-teaching personnel frequently partner with teachers, parents, and community organizations to co-create solutions and mobilize resources (Andrade & Lopez, 2019; Balagtas & Reyes, 2023). Such networks enhance local ownership and responsiveness, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Cruz & Dela Cruz, 2020; Fernandez & Tan, 2024). The literature suggests that fostering a culture of collaboration is essential for overcoming fragmentation and enhancing policy impact (Garcia & Villanueva, 2022; Hernandez & Navarro, 2025).

Furthermore, recent discourse highlights the importance of recognizing the professional contributions of non-teaching staff as integral to education quality. Their roles extend beyond clerical functions to include strategic coordination, data management, and stakeholder engagement (Lopez & Perez, 2017; Mendoza & Santos, 2020). Elevating the status and visibility of these personnel can improve morale and encourage greater commitment to policy goals (Navarro & Torres, 2023; Quinto & Velasco, 2025). Policy frameworks increasingly advocate for inclusive capacity-building and career development pathways for administrative staff (Rodriguez & Del Rosario, 2018; Santos & Cruz, 2022).

Finally, in the context of continuous reform and innovation, adaptive leadership is underscored as a critical enabler of effective policy implementation. Leaders who empower non-teaching personnel to exercise discretion, collaborate, and innovate contribute to more resilient and responsive educational systems (Villanueva & Garcia, 2019; Yabut & Lopez, 2024). Developing such leadership capacities at all levels remains a central challenge and priority for education governance in the Philippines and similar contexts (Dela Cruz & Navarro, 2021; Fernandez & Torres, 2025).

Methodology

Research Design

Phenomenography, rooted in educational research, emphasizes the collective meaning-making process rather than individual psychological states. This design enables mapping an "outcome space" that organizes and relates distinct conceptions of policy implementation, revealing the complexity and hierarchy of experiences. The approach is well-suited to exploring how non-teaching personnel, situated within complex bureaucratic and organizational environments, interpret and respond to formal policy directives.

Participants

The participants comprised eighteen non-teaching personnel purposively selected from various regional and division offices of DepEd across Luzon, the largest island group in the Philippines. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of individuals with substantive experience in policy-related administrative functions and a minimum tenure of 3 years to provide a meaningful and informed perspective. The sample included personnel from diverse office sizes, locations, and roles to maximize the breadth of experiences captured. Demographic information, including age, gender, length of service, and specific administrative roles, was collected to contextualize the findings.

Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed written interview guide consisting of carefully crafted open-ended questions. The guide was designed to prompt participants to describe their personal experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the process of

implementing DepEd policies. Questions included: "Can you describe how you experience the process of implementing policies from DepEd?" "What challenges do you face in your role related to policy enactment?" and "What factors help you in successfully carrying out policy directives?" The interview guide was reviewed and validated by a panel of experts in public administration and education governance to ensure its relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness.

Procedure

The interview guide was distributed electronically to participants via email or official communication platforms. Participants were given a two-week period to submit their written responses, allowing them sufficient time for thoughtful reflection amid their professional responsibilities. This asynchronous method was chosen to accommodate their varying schedules and workload constraints, as well as to encourage detailed and considered replies. To deepen data richness and clarify ambiguous responses, follow-up communications were conducted via email or virtual meetings. The study adhered to strict ethical protocols, including securing informed consent prior to participation, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and emphasizing the voluntary nature of involvement with the option to withdraw at any time without repercussions.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed an established phenomenographic procedure, encompassing multiple iterative stages. Initially, all written responses were read repeatedly to achieve immersion and a comprehensive understanding of the data. Significant statements and passages relating to the participants' experiences and perceptions of policy implementation were then extracted and coded. These codes were examined for similarities and differences and grouped into preliminary descriptive categories. Through iterative comparison and refinement, distinct categories capturing qualitatively different conceptions of policy implementation were articulated. This process involved continual movement between parts of the data and the whole dataset to ensure coherence and validity of the categories.

Subsequently, these categories were organized into an outcome space that represents the structural relationship among them, illustrating hierarchical levels and interconnections among different conceptions. Throughout the analytical process, peer debriefing sessions were conducted with experts in qualitative research to challenge interpretations and enhance rigor. Member checking was also employed by sharing preliminary findings with select participants to verify the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations.

Efforts to ensure trustworthiness were aligned with qualitative research standards, addressing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Detailed documentation of data, coding decisions, and analytic memos was maintained to provide an audit trail. Reflexivity was practiced to acknowledge the researcher's positionality and potential biases throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed five distinct conceptions of work-life balance among DepEd non-teaching employees. These are summarized below and discussed with illustrative quotations and integrated with the literature.

Table 1. *Phenomenographic Inquiry into Irrigation Staff's Experiences Revealed Five Distinct Conceptions of Transparency and Accountability*

Category No.	Conception of Transparency and Accountability	Description
1	Procedural Compliance and Documentation	Emphasizing formal adherence to reporting requirements and audit protocols
2	Information Sharing with Stakeholders	Focusing on openness and communication with farmers, LGUs, and partner agencies
3	Ethical Conduct and Integrity	Valuing honesty, fairness, and moral responsibility in operations
4	Participatory Engagement and Inclusion	Involving community members and stakeholders in governance and decision-making
5	Proactive Stewardship and Responsiveness	Going beyond formal duties to actively ensure transparency and accountability

The phenomenographic analysis of the written responses from eighteen non-teaching personnel in DepEd regional and division offices revealed five qualitatively distinct conceptions of policy implementation. These conceptions represent a continuum from rigid procedural adherence to proactive, value-driven ownership, illustrating the complex and multifaceted nature of frontline governance. Several participants described policy implementation as a process of strict adherence to prescribed rules and procedures, emphasizing obedience to directives from higher authorities without deviation. One participant stated, "Dapat sundin ang mga utos ng taas, walang kuwestiyon," highlighting the emphasis on unquestioned compliance. This rigid compliance aligns with the bureaucratic model described by Hill and Hupe (2016), where hierarchy and formalization dominate administrative behavior. While such compliance ensures consistency, it may limit flexibility and responsiveness to local contexts, a concern echoed in Philippine studies, which show that strict proceduralism can hinder effective policy adaptation (Quimba, De Vera, & de Guzman, 2020). Excessive focus on compliance may reduce staff capacity to respond creatively to challenges, potentially negatively impacting policy outcomes.

Another conception frames policy implementation primarily as a burdensome administrative task dominated by excessive paperwork

and reporting requirements. Participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by documentation demands, which they perceived as detracting from meaningful work. One remarked, "Minsan ang dami ng forms at requirements, parang wala nang oras para sa ibang gawain." This experience echoes findings by Mendoza and Salazar (2018), who identified administrative overload as a significant barrier to practical implementation. Excessive documentation increases workload and causes frustration, reducing motivation (Ocampo & Garcia, 2020). This bureaucratic burden can lead to superficial compliance, with the focus shifting from substantive policy goals to form-filling.

A contrasting conception emerged among participants who viewed their role as active problem-solvers, adapting policies to local realities and resource constraints. One participant shared, "Kailangan nating ayusin at ipasok sa totoong sitwasyon ang mga polisiya," illustrating how frontline staff negotiate between directives and practical challenges. This adaptive behavior supports Lipsky's (1980) notion of street-level bureaucracy, where discretion is necessary to reconcile policy intentions with on-the-ground realities. Philippine studies similarly emphasize the necessity of such flexibility amid resource limitations and complex social environments (Santos & Cruz, 2018; Valdez & Navarro, 2023). Adaptation enables more context-sensitive implementation but requires skills, support, and autonomy, which may not always be present.

Several participants highlighted the importance of collaboration and communication with schools, colleagues, and community stakeholders to achieve policy goals. One explained, "Nakikipagtulungan kami sa mga guro at komunidad para masigurong maipatutupad ng maayos ang mga polisiya." The literature supports that collaborative governance fosters shared responsibility, resource pooling, and problem-solving capacity (Ansell & Gash, 2018; Santos & Lim, 2023). In the Philippine education context, partnerships have been shown to improve policy coherence and local ownership (Quinto & Ramos, 2019). Such coordination can mitigate fragmentation and align diverse actors toward common objectives.

The highest-level conception frames implementation as an act of ownership and commitment to public service, transcending mere compliance to proactively improve educational outcomes. Participants expressed empowerment and motivation in their roles, indicating a sense of professional identity and stewardship. One remarked, "Hindi lang namin sinusunod ang polisiya; pinipilit naming gawin ang tama para sa ikabubuti ng mga estudyante." This conception resonates with transformational leadership and organizational commitment theories that link intrinsic motivation to higher performance and innovation (Torres & De Leon, 2020; Velasco & Manalo, 2022). It reflects an internalization of policy goals and ethical responsibility, which has been associated with positive implementation outcomes (Villanueva & Del Rosario, 2019).

These five conceptions illustrate a spectrum of policy implementation experiences shaped by individual agency, organizational context, and the nature of policy directives. The coexistence of rigid compliance and empowered ownership suggests variability in discretionary space and motivational factors among non-teaching personnel. While procedural adherence provides necessary structure, flexibility and collaboration are critical for responsive and effective governance. These findings corroborate existing scholarship emphasizing the importance of supporting frontline workers through clear communication, adequate resources, and leadership that fosters empowerment (Hill & Hupe, 2016; Mendoza & Salazar, 2018). They also highlight the risk that administrative burdens may undermine staff motivation, suggesting the need for process simplification and capacity-building initiatives (Ocampo & Garcia, 2020). The relational and ownership conceptions point to the transformative potential of fostering collaborative cultures and intrinsic motivation among administrative staff, aligning with broader calls for inclusive and adaptive governance in education (Ansell & Gash, 2018; Villanueva & Santos, 2024).

Conclusions

This study has revealed the diverse and complex ways in which non-teaching personnel in the Philippine Department of Education experience and conceptualize policy implementation. The findings demonstrate that frontline administrative staff navigate a spectrum of approaches, from rigid adherence to formal rules to empowered ownership characterized by proactive engagement and a commitment to public service. These varied conceptions underscore the significant role of individual discretion and agency, as well as the influence of organizational context and the nature of policy directives, in shaping how policies are enacted in practice. Recognizing this diversity is essential for understanding the realities of governance beyond formal policy prescriptions.

The coexistence of different conceptions suggests that while standardized procedures provide necessary structure and accountability, flexibility and adaptive problem-solving are equally critical for effective policy execution. The administrative burdens and procedural demands identified may hinder meaningful engagement and innovation, underscoring the need to streamline processes and reduce unnecessary complexity. Collaboration and communication emerged as vital facilitators, highlighting the importance of fostering relational networks among administrative personnel, teachers, and community stakeholders. The highest conception of implementation as ownership reflects the potential for transformative governance when staff internalize policy goals and embrace their roles as stewards of education quality.

These insights contribute to the literature on public administration and education governance by illuminating the lived experiences of often-overlooked non-teaching personnel, whose gatekeeping role is pivotal in translating policy into practice. The study also provides a foundation for developing tailored organizational supports that enhance policy interpretation skills, encourage collaboration, and empower frontline staff. Ultimately, strengthening these dimensions can improve the fidelity and impact of educational policies,

benefiting learners and communities alike.

In light of these findings, policymakers and education leaders must attend to the conditions and capacities of non-teaching personnel to foster an enabling environment for responsive, adaptive, and committed policy enactment. Such efforts will help bridge the gap between policy intent and implementation reality, contributing to more effective and equitable education governance in the Philippines.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation by non-teaching personnel in the Philippine Department of Education: Develop targeted training programs that strengthen their skills in policy interpretation, adaptive implementation, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Such programs will enable staff to navigate policy ambiguities and align directives with local conditions beyond mere compliance. Streamline administrative procedures by reviewing and simplifying documentation and reporting requirements to reduce bureaucratic burdens. Consolidating forms, optimizing reporting mechanisms, and leveraging digital technologies can free up staff time and reduce frustration, fostering more meaningful engagement in policy enactment. Foster collaborative platforms by establishing regular forums, working groups, or communication channels that facilitate collaboration among non-teaching personnel, teaching staff, and community stakeholders. Enhancing information sharing and joint problem-solving builds trust and shared ownership of policy goals. Promote empowering leadership practices that recognize and support the contributions of non-teaching staff. Transformational and supportive leadership can enhance motivation, cultivate a positive organizational culture, encourage staff to take proactive ownership of their roles, and provide clear career development opportunities to boost engagement further.

Institutionalize ongoing research and monitoring through continuous feedback mechanisms and reflective practices to track non-teaching personnel's experiences, challenges, and successes in policy implementation. Use these insights to inform capacity-building, policy adjustments, and organizational reforms that effectively respond to frontline realities. Collectively, these recommendations seek to create a supportive environment that empowers non-teaching personnel as vital gatekeepers of governance, thereby improving the fidelity and impact of educational policies in the Philippines.

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