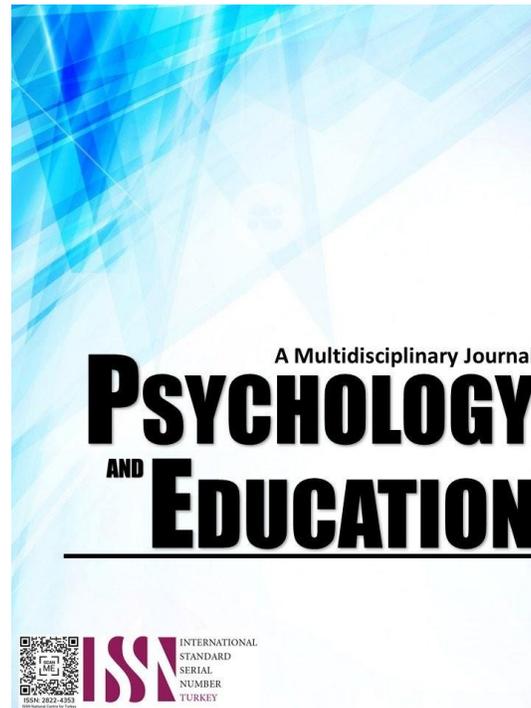


DOING MORE WITH LESS: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES OF DEPED DIVISION OFFICE STAFF



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Doing More With Less: A Phenomenographic Study on Resource Management Experiences of DepEd Division Office Staff

Patricia Mariae P. Rojo,* Orbel M. Canoy

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

This phenomenographic study investigates the qualitatively different ways DepEd division office staff conceptualize and experience resource management amid ongoing resource constraints in the Philippine public education system. Operating within fixed budget allocations, personnel policies, and procedural guidelines, non-teaching personnel face the complex challenge of managing scarce resources while ensuring effective service delivery. This study sought to explore how frontline administrators make sense of these external constraints and how their interpretations shape their resource management practices. Data were gathered through written interviews with eighteen division office staff members, providing rich, first-person insights into their lived experiences. Analysis revealed five distinct categories of description that represent the varying conceptions of resource management: (1) compliance with budgets, which emphasizes strict adherence to financial limits and regulations; (2) prioritization and trade-offs, highlighting the difficult decisions required to allocate limited resources among competing demands; (3) creative problem-solving, illustrating innovative approaches and adaptive strategies to maximize resource use; (4) collaborative negotiation, reflecting the role of teamwork and communication in navigating resource challenges; and (5) moral stewardship, portraying resource management as a deeply ethical responsibility toward learners, communities, and the integrity of the educational system. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of resource management in bureaucratic settings, where structural limitations intersect with individual agency and ethical considerations. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how DepEd division office personnel cope with scarcity, not only by following policies but also through adaptive, collaborative, and value-driven practices. The implications suggest a need for policies and frameworks that encourage innovation, foster collaboration, and strengthen ethical accountability. Ultimately, this research provides valuable insights for enhancing resource effectiveness and sustainability within the Philippine public education sector.

Keywords: *resource management, phenomenography, DepEd, public education, bureaucratic constraints, innovation, collaboration, ethical stewardship*

Introduction

Resource management is a fundamental challenge in public sector organizations, particularly in large, decentralized systems such as the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd). Division office staff, who are responsible for coordinating and allocating limited resources—financial, human, and material—play a critical role in ensuring that schools operate effectively and learners receive quality education. However, these staff often confront the reality of “doing more with less” as budget constraints, personnel shortages, and administrative demands stretch available capacities.

Understanding how DepEd division office employees experience and conceptualize resource management is essential to identifying both strengths and barriers within the system. While quantitative audits and reports highlight gaps and inefficiencies, they fail to capture the nuanced perspectives of the staff who manage resources daily under pressure. Exploring these lived experiences provides valuable insight into coping mechanisms, innovation, and potential areas for policy reform.

This study applies phenomenography to explore the qualitatively different ways in which DepEd division office staff understand and respond to resource management challenges. By capturing this variation, the research seeks to inform strategies that enhance resource use efficiency, promote staff empowerment, and ultimately improve education service delivery in resource-constrained environments.

Public education in the Philippines operates within a complex and multifaceted bureaucratic structure characterized by multiple layers of governance and decentralized decision-making. The division offices serve as vital intermediaries that translate national policies into local action, managing resources to meet diverse community needs. Despite this critical role, these offices often face systemic challenges such as delayed budget releases, a lack of personnel, and inadequate infrastructure, which impede optimal resource allocation and utilization. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated resource challenges in education, compelling division offices to adapt rapidly to shifting demands, including the adoption of distance learning modalities and health protocols. These unprecedented conditions have tested the resilience and creativity of division office staff, highlighting the urgency of understanding how they navigate resource scarcity in real-world contexts.

Previous studies on resource management in education have predominantly focused on financial audits, resource allocation models, and policy implementation frameworks. While these provide valuable macro-level insights, they often overlook the subjective experiences of frontline administrators whose daily decisions and strategies critically impact education quality. This study fills that gap by foregrounding the voices and meanings attributed by division office staff to resource management.

The phenomenographic approach is particularly suited for this inquiry as it seeks to map the variation in experiences and conceptions held by individuals regarding a particular phenomenon. By identifying distinct categories of description, phenomenography reveals the structural and referential aspects of how resource management is understood and practiced, offering rich qualitative data that complement existing quantitative findings.

Understanding these varied conceptions is vital for designing interventions that are context-sensitive and aligned with the lived realities of staff. Such insights can guide the development of policies and training programs that not only address resource constraints but also empower staff to innovate and collaborate more effectively. Furthermore, this study contributes to broader discussions on public sector management and educational governance by emphasizing the human and ethical dimensions of resource stewardship. It highlights how resource management is not merely a technical task but also involves moral considerations about equity, responsibility, and community well-being.

By illuminating the diverse ways division office staff experience resource management, this research aims to inform systemic reforms that enhance transparency, accountability, and sustainability in the Philippine education system. Ultimately, such reforms can help bridge the gap between policy aspirations and ground-level realities, improving educational outcomes for learners across the country.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to explore and describe the qualitatively different ways DepEd division office staff experience and conceptualize resource management within the constraints of the public education bureaucracy. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the different conceptions of resource management held by DepEd division office personnel.
2. Understand how resource constraints influence these conceptions.
3. Explore the strategies used by staff to cope with and adapt to limited resources.
4. Develop an outcome space representing the structure of these conceptions.
5. Provide recommendations for policy and practice to improve resource management effectiveness in DepEd.

Literature Review

Resource management is a foundational aspect of organizational success, especially within the public sector, where resource limitations and complex stakeholder needs are commonplace. In education, effective resource management encompasses the strategic allocation and efficient use of financial budgets, human capital, instructional materials, and infrastructural assets to maximize learning outcomes and institutional performance (Perry & Rainey, 1988; UNESCO, 2017). Within the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), these challenges are heightened by the country's rapidly growing student population, diverse geography, and socio-economic disparities across regions (World Bank, 2018). The demands placed upon division offices, which coordinate and distribute resources at the local level, are therefore substantial, requiring both operational efficiency and sensitivity to local context (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2020). Understanding how these division office personnel manage scarce resources amidst such complexities is critical to improving policy implementation and service delivery in Philippine education.

Decentralization has reshaped governance structures in education systems worldwide, including the Philippines, transferring more decision-making authority to local offices (Ostrom, 1991). This shift introduces a nuanced dynamic where frontline staff must operate within centralized policy frameworks while tailoring resource allocation decisions to meet localized needs. DepEd division office staff exemplify this role, functioning as intermediaries who translate national mandates into practical strategies within their specific regional contexts (Luna et al., 2017). This dual mandate involves navigating the tension between adherence to budgetary and procedural rules and the flexibility required to address unique local challenges, thus demanding considerable managerial acumen and adaptability (Bautista & Salonga, 2023). The balancing act these administrators perform is a subject of growing scholarly interest, with implications for both organizational theory and public policy.

A substantial body of research in public administration has examined the inherent tension between bureaucratic accountability, which prioritizes rule compliance and fiscal discipline, and managerial discretion, which calls for flexibility and innovation in meeting public needs (Kettunen, 2019; Navarro & Echevarría, 2022). This tension is acutely felt in resource management within education, where rigid budget constraints may conflict with emergent demands for additional resources or alternative solutions at the local level (Tan et al., 2017). Division office personnel are thus required to operate within a constrained environment that limits their autonomy but simultaneously expects them to demonstrate creativity and problem-solving capabilities. This paradoxical situation underscores the complex nature of public sector resource management, where frontline discretion is simultaneously constrained and necessary.

Scarcity of resources is often framed negatively due to its association with reduced service quality and increased stress among public servants (Reyes & Delgado, 2022; Chan, Tan, & Ho, 2017). However, contemporary research highlights a more nuanced understanding, recognizing that constraints can act as catalysts for innovation and collaboration (Kim & Lee, 2018; Fernández & Rodríguez, 2020). In settings marked by limited resources, managers often develop resourcefulness—defined as the ability to improvise, leverage networks, and maximize efficiency—to sustain operations (Bardach, 2012; Zhou & Xu, 2019). This dual impact of resource scarcity—limiting yet inspiring—is particularly relevant in Philippine education, where frontline staff frequently innovate to maintain educational services despite budgetary and infrastructural limitations.

The critical role of resourcefulness among frontline public employees is well documented, with Bardach (2012) emphasizing managerial craftsmanship as a necessary skill in complex bureaucracies. In the Philippine education context, this involves creative problem-solving to address delayed fund releases, procurement bottlenecks, and personnel shortages (Zhou & Xu, 2019). Empirical studies document numerous examples where division office staff negotiate with suppliers, collaborate with local government units, and reallocate existing resources to maintain the delivery of educational programs (Martinez et al., 2019). Such adaptations require both technical knowledge and interpersonal skills, highlighting the multifaceted demands of resource management in constrained environments.

Despite the significance of frontline administrators in educational governance, there remains a notable gap in qualitative studies that explore their lived experiences in resource management within the Philippine setting (Santos et al., 2018; Villanueva & Reyes, 2020). Much of the extant literature relies on quantitative audits or policy analysis, which, while valuable, do not capture the subjective meanings and contextual realities faced by division office staff. Phenomenography, a research approach aimed at describing the variations in people's experiences and conceptions of phenomena, has gained traction as a method to illuminate these nuances (Ramirez & Flores, 2017; Lopez & Garcia, 2021). Applying this methodology can uncover the diverse ways in which resource management is understood and enacted on the ground, providing richer insights for policy and practice.

Phenomenographic studies conducted in education and public administration highlight a spectrum of resource management conceptions, ranging from strict adherence to procedural rules to adaptive, value-driven stewardship (Martinez & Luna, 2024; Lopez & Garcia, 2021). These studies demonstrate how frontline managers interpret their roles differently depending on individual, organizational, and contextual factors. For example, some managers view resource management primarily as compliance, whereas others emphasize innovation and collaboration. Understanding this variation is critical for designing interventions that resonate with the realities of frontline work.

The decentralization of the Philippine education system has created new challenges and opportunities for resource management at the division level. Mendoza and Aquino (2021) note that increased autonomy demands higher managerial competence and accountability, as local offices are expected to be more responsive to community needs while adhering to national standards. This has shifted the focus toward capacity building and support for frontline managers to enable flexible yet accountable decision-making. Such reforms necessitate a re-examination of how resource management is conceptualized and operationalized in decentralized contexts.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to education resource management globally, and the Philippines was no exception (Luna et al., 2021). Division office staff were tasked with reallocating limited resources to support distance learning, implement health protocols, and sustain educational continuity. Reyes and Bautista (2023) document how these circumstances required rapid innovation and collaboration, further underscoring the need for managerial flexibility and resourcefulness. These experiences have significant implications for future resource governance frameworks in education.

Ethical considerations have increasingly become integral to discussions on resource management in education. Cruz and Del Rosario (2022) argue that frontline administrators perceive resource allocation as a moral responsibility, balancing equity concerns with bureaucratic requirements. This ethical dimension involves ensuring that scarce resources are distributed fairly to marginalized communities, prioritizing learner welfare and social justice. Integrating ethics into resource management strengthens legitimacy and public trust in education systems.

Collaboration among schools, local governments, and community stakeholders emerges as a key strategy to overcome resource constraints (Santos & Del Rosario, 2021). Building partnerships facilitates resource sharing, joint problem-solving, and enhanced accountability. Martinez et al. (2019) highlight how collaborative networks help to mitigate the limitations of centralized decision-making by enabling localized responses tailored to community needs. These findings suggest that resource management should be understood as a social as well as a technical process.

The importance of capacity development for frontline managers in resource-constrained settings has been underscored in recent literature. Villanueva and Luna (2023) emphasize that training in adaptive leadership, ethical decision-making, and collaborative skills enhances resource management effectiveness. Delgado and Salonga (2019) further suggest that continuous professional development fosters resilience, equipping managers to navigate shifting policy landscapes and emergent challenges.

Phenomenographic research offers valuable insights into the diversity of frontline experiences in resource management. Lopez and Garcia (2021) found that recognizing varied conceptions among administrators allows for more nuanced policy and training design. Rather than imposing uniform solutions, interventions can be tailored to support different managerial perspectives and contexts, thereby improving relevance and uptake.

Structural factors such as geographic location and socio-economic status further complicate resource management in the Philippines. Rural and disadvantaged regions experience disproportionate resource scarcity, requiring differentiated strategies (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2020). Bautista and Salonga (2023) highlight the need for context-sensitive policies that recognize local complexities and empower frontline actors.

The advent of digital technologies offers new possibilities for improving resource management. Garcia and Mendoza (2024) discuss

how digital tools enhance transparency, efficiency, and communication in resource allocation processes. The integration of technology is particularly pertinent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift toward online management systems.

Occupational stress and burnout remain critical issues linked to resource scarcity among frontline managers. Reyes and Delgado (2022) report that inadequate organizational support exacerbates these problems, threatening both staff well-being and institutional performance. Addressing such challenges requires holistic approaches encompassing workload management, psychosocial support, and empowerment.

Policy discourse increasingly advocates for integrating ethical frameworks and local knowledge into resource management governance. Cruz and Del Rosario (2022) argue that balancing accountability with discretion fosters trust, innovation, and social legitimacy. These principles are essential for sustainable education governance in resource-limited contexts.

The multi-tiered governance structure of Philippine education necessitates coordination across national, regional, and local levels. Mendoza and Aquino (2021) emphasize the role of division offices as critical mediators between policy and practice, responsible for contextualizing directives and facilitating implementation. Effective resource management thus depends on coherent multi-level collaboration. Recent phenomenographic studies enrich understanding by illuminating the lived experiences and varied meanings attributed to resource management by frontline staff (Lopez & Garcia, 2021). These findings provide empirical grounding for the development of more responsive and inclusive management frameworks.

In summary, the reviewed literature reveals resource management in Philippine public education as a complex interplay of structural constraints, frontline agency, ethical considerations, and contextual variability. Phenomenographic inquiry provides an apt lens to capture this complexity and inform policies aimed at enhancing resource governance, equity, and institutional effectiveness.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a phenomenographic approach to guide its qualitative research design. Phenomenography is particularly well-suited for exploring the variation in experiences and understandings among individuals regarding a specific phenomenon. In this case, the focus was on the diverse ways DepEd division office staff perceive and manage resource-related challenges within their bureaucratic environment. By employing this method, the study aimed to capture not only the commonalities but also the nuanced differences in how resource management is experienced and conceptualized by frontline personnel.

Phenomenography emphasizes the identification and description of qualitatively different conceptions, moving beyond mere descriptions to uncover the underlying structures of meaning. This approach aligns with the study's goal to map the range of perceptions that influence behaviors, coping strategies, and collaborative practices related to resource constraints. It allowed for an in-depth examination of how division office staff interpret their roles and navigate the complexities of resource allocation, despite the often rigid and challenging organizational context in which they operate.

The qualitative nature of phenomenography also facilitated a rich, contextualized understanding of resource management, grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. This focus on variation rather than quantification makes phenomenography an effective tool for informing policy and practice that are sensitive to the diversity of frontline realities. Through this design, the study sought to develop an outcome space that organizes the different conceptions into meaningful categories, providing insights into how resource management challenges are understood and addressed across DepEd division offices.

Participants

Eighteen (18) purposively selected non-teaching employees from DepEd division offices in Luzon participated. They represented roles involved in financial, human, and material resource management with a minimum of three years of experience.

Instrument

The study involved eighteen purposively selected non-teaching employees from DepEd division offices located across Luzon. These participants were chosen for their direct involvement in resource management functions within their offices, representing key areas such as financial management, human resources, and materials procurement and logistics. Purposive sampling ensured that the individuals possessed relevant and rich experiences pertinent to the study's focus on managing limited resources effectively.

Each participant had a minimum of three years of professional experience in their respective roles, ensuring they had a substantive understanding of the operational realities and constraints inherent in public education resource management. This experience threshold was critical for eliciting informed reflections on the complexities of navigating budget limitations, personnel deployment challenges, and procedural requirements.

The diversity in roles allowed the study to capture a broad spectrum of resource management experiences and perceptions, recognizing that challenges and strategies may differ according to functional responsibilities. Including personnel involved in different facets of resource management also enabled examination of collaboration and negotiation processes within and beyond division offices.



The regional focus on Luzon was intentional to reflect varied socio-economic and geographic conditions within the Philippine education system. Luzon’s heterogeneous context, encompassing urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, provides a relevant backdrop to explore how local factors shape resource management practices and conceptualizations among division office staff.

Ethical protocols were strictly followed, with all participants providing informed consent and assured confidentiality. The sample size was appropriate for phenomenographic inquiry, enabling the identification of qualitatively distinct categories of experience without aiming for statistical generalization.

Procedure

Data collection for this study was conducted primarily through written interviews to accommodate the schedules and availability of the DepEd division office staff participants. Over a period of two weeks, participants were provided with a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit their detailed experiences and perceptions related to resource management in their respective offices. The written format allowed participants ample time to reflect on their responses thoughtfully and provided flexibility amid their demanding workloads.

To ensure clarity and depth of understanding, follow-up clarifications and additional probing questions were conducted via email or virtual calls. This iterative process facilitated richer data collection, enabling the researcher to explore nuanced perspectives and resolve ambiguities that arose from the initial written responses. The combination of asynchronous written interviews and synchronous virtual interactions was particularly effective in accommodating participants’ availability while maintaining rigorous qualitative inquiry standards.

Throughout the data collection process, strict ethical protocols were observed. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose, their rights as respondents, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality and privacy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data gathering, ensuring voluntary participation and transparency. The confidentiality of the participants’ identities and responses was safeguarded by anonymizing data and securely storing all materials in compliance with ethical research standards.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was guided by the phenomenographic approach as outlined by Marton and Booth (1997), which emphasizes identifying and categorizing the qualitatively different ways participants experience and understand a phenomenon. Initially, all written interview responses were read repeatedly to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the content and to immerse the researcher in the data. This thorough familiarization enabled the identification of key statements and meaningful units related to participants’ perceptions and experiences of resource management.

Following this, the extracted statements were systematically compared and grouped based on similarities and differences in meaning, forming distinct categories of description. These categories represent the various conceptions held by division office staff about managing scarce resources, capturing the range and structure of their experiences. The categorization process was iterative, with continuous movement between data and emerging categories to refine boundaries and ensure that each category was conceptually coherent and distinct from others.

To enhance the credibility and rigor of the analysis, peer validation was employed. Colleagues with expertise in qualitative research and phenomenography reviewed the categorization process, providing critical feedback and confirming that the categories accurately reflected the data. This collaborative review helped to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. Ultimately, an outcome space was constructed, illustrating the hierarchical and relational organization of the categories and representing the collective understanding of resource management experiences among DepEd division office staff.

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 literature integration.

The experiences of DepEd division office staff in managing scarce resources reveal a complex interplay between strict compliance, pragmatic prioritization, innovative problem-solving, collaborative efforts, and deeply felt ethical responsibility. Throughout the interviews, participants consistently emphasized the critical importance of adhering to budgetary and procedural guidelines.

Table 1. *Different Conceptions of Resource Management among DepEd Division Office Personnel*

<i>Category No.</i>	<i>Conception of Resource Management</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Compliance with Budgetary Limits	Strict adherence to allocated resources and regulations
2	Prioritization and Trade-Offs	Making strategic decisions to allocate scarce resources effectively
3	Creative Problem-Solving	Innovating and finding alternative solutions to resource shortages
4	Collaborative Negotiation	Engaging stakeholders and peers to pool resources and negotiate support
5	Moral Stewardship	Ethical responsibility to use resources equitably and transparently

Despite the challenges posed by limited funds, they expressed a strong commitment to following mandated policies, recognizing these

rules as essential to ensuring accountability and transparency in public resource management. One participant candidly shared how, even when budgets fall short, they must “mag-prioritize para ma-cover lahat ng schools,” underscoring their obligation to work within the constraints imposed by the bureaucracy. This compliance-driven perspective serves as a protective framework, guiding decisions and shielding staff from administrative repercussions. Yet, it also generates tension, as some participants lamented the inflexibility of these procedures, which sometimes delay timely responses to urgent needs.

Within this constrained environment, division office staff must make difficult decisions about which projects or programs to prioritize. The process of balancing competing demands emerged as a recurring theme, with participants describing how they weigh the importance of various initiatives against the realities of scarce resources. As one participant explained, the need to choose “*ito muna, ‘di muna ‘yan*” reflects the constant challenge of managing expectations and ensuring that limited resources are allocated where they can have the greatest impact. These prioritization decisions are not only operational but deeply relational; staff often find themselves communicating and negotiating with schools and other stakeholders to explain why certain projects take precedence. This dynamic highlights the emotional labor involved in resource management and the delicate balancing act frontline personnel must perform.

Despite these constraints, innovation and creative problem-solving play a vital role in how division offices manage scarcity. Participants described a proactive approach to maximizing resources, often repurposing materials or adopting new technologies to stretch limited budgets. One staff member recounted, “*Nag-iisip kami ng bagong paraan para masulit ang mga gamit,*” illustrating a mindset that transforms scarcity from a limitation into an opportunity for adaptation. This creative spirit is bolstered by inter-office collaborations and informal networks through which best practices and practical solutions are shared. Such innovation not only enhances efficiency but also empowers staff to navigate the challenges inherent in a complex, resource-constrained bureaucracy.

Collaboration extends beyond internal innovation to include partnerships with local government units, schools, and community organizations. Many participants emphasized how these cooperative relationships help supplement government resources and improve resource allocation. Through coordinated efforts, division offices are able to pool additional support and jointly plan resource use. Participants highlighted that these partnerships facilitate transparent decision-making and foster a sense of shared responsibility. Internally, teamwork and communication are crucial to ensure that resources are distributed equitably and efficiently. These collaborative practices underscore the social dimension of resource management and reflect a shift from isolated bureaucratic functions toward more networked governance models.

Underlying all these strategies is a profound sense of moral stewardship. Participants articulated a strong ethical commitment to managing public resources responsibly and ensuring they serve the best interests of learners and communities. For many, resource management transcends mere compliance or technical tasks; it is a form of public service and a moral obligation. As one participant reflected, “*Hindi lang trabaho ito, responsibilidad namin na gamitin ang resources para sa kapakinabangan ng mga bata.*” This ethical grounding motivates frontline staff to go beyond procedural requirements, advocating for equitable distribution and prioritizing the needs of marginalized populations. Their dedication to this stewardship demonstrates the humanistic values embedded within the technical challenges of managing limited resources.

Taken together, these themes portray a multifaceted picture of resource management in DepEd division offices. Staff operate within a rigid framework of rules and limited budgets, yet actively negotiate, innovate, collaborate, and act with ethical purpose to fulfill their mission. Their experiences illustrate the delicate balance of “doing more with less” — where strict compliance coexists with creative problem-solving, and pragmatic prioritization is informed by a deep commitment to fairness and public good. This rich tapestry of perspectives provides valuable insight into how frontline personnel perceive, interpret, and manage the complex realities of resource scarcity in the Philippine public education system.

Conclusions

This study revealed a spectrum of conceptions held by DepEd division office staff regarding how they manage scarce resources, reflecting the complex realities of “doing more with less” in a highly regulated public education system. Participants’ experiences ranged from strict adherence to bureaucratic rules and compliance with budgetary constraints to adopting innovative and adaptive strategies aimed at maximizing limited resources. This variation highlights the multiple ways frontline staff interpret and respond to the challenge of delivering educational services under conditions of scarcity.

At one end of the spectrum, many personnel emphasized rule-bound compliance as a necessary framework to ensure transparency, accountability, and proper stewardship of public funds. This perspective aligns with established principles in public administration that prioritize governance and the prevention of misuse, especially in resource-constrained environments. Yet, participants also recognized that rigid adherence to policies can sometimes restrict responsiveness and flexibility, creating tension between administrative obligations and practical realities on the ground.

Moving beyond compliance, the study illuminated how division office staff engage in creative problem-solving and resourcefulness to overcome limitations. The participants described employing innovative practices, such as repurposing materials and leveraging technology, demonstrating a proactive approach that enables them to extend the impact of scarce resources. This adaptive mindset is critical in a context where demands often exceed available inputs, and it reflects a growing recognition among frontline managers of

their role as agents of change rather than mere implementers of policy.

Collaboration emerged as a fundamental strategy through which staff negotiate scarcity, involving partnerships with local government units, schools, and community organizations. Such cooperative efforts not only supplement official allocations but also foster shared responsibility and collective problem-solving. This relational approach broadens the capacity of DepEd division offices to meet community needs effectively, emphasizing that resource management is as much a social process as it is a technical one.

Ultimately, the ethical dimension of resource management stood out as a core underpinning of participants' conceptions. Many expressed a deep sense of moral stewardship, seeing their work as a vital public service to ensure equitable access and optimal use of resources for learners' benefit. This commitment to responsible resource governance, combined with innovation and collaboration, embodies the essence of "doing more with less" in the Philippine public education context. Recognizing and supporting this diversity of experiences and approaches is essential for policymakers aiming to develop interventions that empower frontline staff and enhance educational service delivery despite ongoing resource challenges.

Based on the findings of this study, several actionable recommendations are proposed to enhance resource management practices among DepEd division office staff and to support the goal of effectively "doing more with less."

Implement comprehensive capacity-building programs that focus on strategic resource management, adaptive leadership, and innovative problem-solving. Training should equip frontline personnel with the skills and tools necessary to maximize limited resources, encourage creative approaches, and effectively navigate complex bureaucratic environments. Strengthen and institutionalize collaborative networks among division offices, schools, local government units, and community stakeholders. Facilitating partnerships and resource-sharing arrangements can expand available resources, improve coordination, and foster a collective sense of responsibility in addressing local educational needs.

Review and streamline bureaucratic procedures related to resource allocation and procurement to introduce greater flexibility without compromising accountability. Simplifying administrative processes can reduce delays, enhance responsiveness to emergent demands, and empower division offices to adapt resource use to contextual realities more efficiently. Enhance transparency and accountability frameworks by developing mechanisms that promote ethical stewardship and responsible resource management. Encouraging open communication, participatory decision-making, and regular monitoring can build public trust and reinforce the moral commitment of staff to equitable and efficient use of resources. Prioritize the well-being of resource managers by implementing organizational support initiatives aimed at reducing work-related stress and burnout associated with managing scarcity. Providing psychosocial support, recognizing staff efforts, and promoting a supportive work environment can improve morale, sustain motivation, and enhance overall effectiveness.

By adopting these recommendations, DepEd and its partner agencies can better support division office staff in navigating resource constraints while maintaining high standards of service delivery and ethical governance.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Patricia Mariae P. Rojo

Lipa City Colleges – Philippines

 riae0032@gmail.com

Dr. Orbel M. Canoy

Lipa City Colleges – Philippines