

Levels of School Learning Environment of Public High Schools: Implications to Educational Leaders

¹Reyjean C. Porras, EdD, ²Rhodora A. Cartagena, PhD, ²Cyril John S. Tubola, LPT

¹Department of Education

²University of San Agustin

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0053>

Received: 19 January 2025; Accepted: 23 January 2025; Published: 26 February 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explored the learning environment in public high schools within the Division of Iloilo using a descriptive-correlational research design. A total of 246 respondents, including teachers and school heads, were selected through multi-stage sampling. Data collected via a validated researcher-developed questionnaire were analyzed using Cramer's V test. Results showed a very weak and statistically non-significant association between teachers' perceptions of the learning environment and school category ($V=0.065$, $p=0.685$). However, a weak yet significant association was found with the SBM (School-Based Management) level of practice ($V=0.193$, $p=0.036$), with 77% of teachers in Level II and III schools perceiving the environment as highly conducive compared to 54.5% in Level I schools. School heads reported weak and moderate non-significant associations with school category ($V=0.137$, $p=0.535$) and SBM level of practice ($V=0.264$, $p=0.098$), with most ($f=67$) reporting a highly conducive environment regardless of school size or SBM level. These findings suggest that while school heads view their environments as conducive, teachers' perceptions are influenced by SBM practices, emphasizing the need for educational leaders to strengthen SBM initiatives to improve the learning environment consistently across schools.

Keywords: learning environment, School-Based Management (SBM), educational leadership, teachers, school heads

INTRODUCTION

The learning environment in public high schools plays a pivotal role in ensuring quality education and fostering students' academic, social, and emotional growth. As key institutions in the education system, public high schools face unique challenges, including resource limitations, diverse student populations, and the need to meet national education standards. A conducive learning environment within these schools is essential for engaging students, supporting their holistic development, and achieving academic success.

Educational leaders, particularly school heads and teachers in public high schools, are instrumental in shaping and sustaining effective learning environments. Their leadership and collaborative efforts are vital in addressing barriers and creating settings that nurture intellectual, social, and emotional well-being. In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) underscores the importance of positive learning environments through its Vision, Mission, and Core Values, aiming to empower public schools to deliver equitable and high-quality education.

Despite these efforts, empirical evidence on the specific elements of learning environments that influence the performance of public high schools remains limited. Studies such as those by Kyriakides and Creemers (2016) emphasize that institutional leadership, curricular resources, and environmental factors significantly contribute

to school success. However, gaps remain in understanding how these factors manifest in public high schools and impact their unique contexts.

This study focuses on assessing the levels of the school learning environment in public high schools and examining their implications for educational leaders. By exploring the perceptions of teachers and school heads in the Division of Iloilo, it seeks to identify the strengths and challenges of current learning environments and aim to guide policymakers and administrators in optimizing strategies and resources to enhance the learning experience in public high schools.

Through its findings, this study aspires to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within public high schools and the critical role of educational leadership in creating environments that support both academic excellence and the holistic development of learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Cognitive Theory, as proposed by Albert Bandura (Bandura & Hall, 2018), offers a foundational framework for understanding how school learning environments influence academic performance. Bandura emphasizes the importance of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping behavior, which is crucial in the context of public high schools. The perceptions of teachers and students regarding their learning environment—encompassing peer interactions, teacher support, and institutional culture—are integral to shaping academic outcomes. Bandura suggests that individuals learn not only through direct experiences but also by observing and modeling behaviors demonstrated by others. In schools, positive reinforcements, such as praise for academic achievements or effective study habits modeled by educators, can encourage students to adopt similar behaviors. Additionally, the theory highlights the dynamic relationship between cognitive processes and external environmental factors, where elements like teacher feedback, peer relationships, and school policies collectively shape academic performance.

Research consistently supports the critical role of a favorable school learning environment in enhancing educational outcomes. Studies by Gangi (2010) and others highlight that environments characterized by supportive teacher-student interactions, resource availability, and a positive school culture are associated with higher student achievement and improved attitudes. Moreover, the Theory of Performance by Wallace Bacon (2001), as cited by Vella et al. (2013), further underscores the connection between teacher instructional competence and school performance. High-performing schools typically feature motivated teachers who thrive in environments that foster professional growth. These findings illustrate the significant impact of school structures, leadership, and social dynamics on educational success, emphasizing the need for educational leaders to focus on strengthening the learning environments in public high schools. This focus not only improves student outcomes but also enhances teacher performance, making it a priority for educational leaders to nurture conducive learning environments that support both student and teacher development.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design using survey methods to examine the association perceived school learning environments of teachers and school heads in public high schools in the Schools Division of Iloilo. The respondents included 67 school heads and 179 teachers, selected through multi-stage stratified sampling to ensure representation across districts and school categories (small, medium, and large). Data collection was conducted using a researcher-made and validated questionnaire covering demographics and three areas: student development and engagement, teacher affiliation and involvement, and school leadership and management. The questionnaire responses were scored on a four-point Likert scale and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 24.0. Frequency distributions described respondent characteristics and perceptions, while Cramér's V assessed associations among variables, with significance set at $\alpha=0.05$. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, anonymity, and approval from the Central Philippine University - Research Ethics and Review Board (CPU-RERB), were rigorously observed to ensure the integrity and safety of participants throughout the study.

RESULTS

Table 1 Association between Schools' Characteristics by School Category and SBM Level of Practice, and Teachers' Perceived Prevailing Learning Environment

Teachers' Perceived Prevailing Learning Environment							
Schools' Characteristics		At Most Conducive		Highly Conducive		Total	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
School Category	Small School	20	31.30	44	68.80	64	100.00
	Medium School	18	25.00	54	75.00	72	100.00
	Large School	11	25.60	32	74.40	43	100.00
	Cramer's V	0.065	p= 0.685				
SBM Level of Practice	Level I	15	45.50	18	54.50	33	100.00
	Level II	23	23.20	76	76.80	99	100.00
	Level III	11	23.40	36	76.60	47	100.00
	Cramer's V	0.193*	p= 0.036				
	Total	49	130		179		

Note. Table 1 reveals a very weak, non-significant association between teachers' perceptions of the prevailing learning environment and school category ($V=0.065$, $p=0.685$), but a significantly weak association with the SBM level of practice ($V=0.193$, $p=0.036$), with 77% of Level II and III schools perceived as highly conducive compared to 54.5% in Level I.

Scale and Interpretation (Cramer's V value): $\pm 0.30 \leq v$ (Strong), $\pm 0.20 \leq v \leq \pm 0.29$ (Moderate), $\pm 0.10 \leq v \leq \pm 0.19$ (Weak), $v < \pm 0.10$ (Very Weak); * $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 2 Association between Schools' Characteristics by School Category and SBM Level of Practice, and School Heads' Perceived Prevailing Learning Environment

School Heads' Perceived Prevailing Learning Environment							
Schools' Characteristics		At Most Conducive		Highly Conducive		Total	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
School Category	Small School	0	0.00	19	100.00	19	100.00
	Medium School	2	6.50	29	93.50	31	100.00
	Large School	1	5.90	16	94.10	17	100.00
	Cramer's V	0.137	p= 0.535				
SBM Level of Practice	Level I	0	0.00	5	100.00	5	100.00
	Level II	0	0.00	35	100.00	35	100.00
	Level III	3	11.10	24	89.90	27	100.00
	Cramer's V	0.264	p= 0.098				
	Total	3	64		67		

Note. Table 2 reveals that school heads demonstrate weak to moderate non-significant associations between their perceived prevailing learning environment and school characteristics, including school category

($V=0.137$, $p=0.535$) and SBM level of practice ($V=0.264$, $p=0.098$), with most ($f=67$) perceiving their schools as highly conducive regardless of size or SBM level.

Scale and Interpretation (Cramer's V value): $\pm 0.30 \leq v$ (Strong), $\pm 0.20 \leq v \leq \pm 0.29$ (Moderate), $\pm 0.10 \leq v \leq \pm 0.19$ (Weak), $v < \pm 0.10$ (Very Weak); * $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' Perceived Prevailing Learning Environment

Understanding the association between school characteristics, such as school category and School-Based Management (SBM) level of practice, and teacher-perceived prevailing learning environment is critical for identifying factors that contribute to the efficacy of education in the Division of Iloilo. To present insights into the dynamics shaping teaching and learning experiences in various types of schools and SBM practices by investigating how these institutional factors correlate with teachers' perceptions of the learning environment, Table 1 qualifies the targeted measures and regulations that are geared toward creating a more conducive and supportive learning environment, thereby improving student outcomes and overall educational quality.

Table 1 shows a very weak non-significant association between teachers perceived prevailing learning environment and schools' characteristics in terms of school category ($V=0.065$, $p=0.685$). Regardless of school category, teachers' perceptions on school learning environment are dominantly highly conducive. However, there is a significantly weak association between the perceived prevailing learning environment and the SBM level of practice ($V=0.193$, $p=0.036$). It is shown that when grouped according to SBM level of practice, among Level II and Level III, approximately 77% of the considerations tend towards a highly conducive learning space far from those 54.50% who belong to Level I perceiving it the same.

The very weak, non-significant association between teachers perceived prevailing learning environment and school characteristics in terms of school category suggests that schools either small, medium, or large have no substantial contribution to teachers' perceptions of the learning environment in the Division of Iloilo. Despite this lack of association, teacher perceptions of the learning environment across all school categories are consistently positive, indicating a shared commitment to creating optimal learning spaces regardless of school size. The fact that there is a consistent tendency to perceive the learning environment as highly conducive across all school categories, despite the non-significant association, highlights how important it is to create a positive and supportive learning environment in schools of all sizes. Regardless of the type of school, administrators should give top priority to projects that improve instruction and learning environments in order to guarantee that all students have fair access to a top-notch education.

On the other hand, the notably weak association between the teachers' perceived prevailing learning environment and the level of SBM practice emphasizes the possibility that the implementation of SBM allows interference with teachers' views about the learning environment. Following teachers' perceptions, schools with higher levels of SBM practice may be more successful in creating a highly conducive learning environment, even though the precise mechanisms underlying this association are not fully understood. More specifically, compared to teachers in Level I schools, teachers in schools with Level II and Level III SBM practices typically feel that the learning environment is more supportive. Schools with higher levels of SBM practice may benefit from increased autonomy, resources, and collaboration opportunities, which can lead to better teaching and learning results. As a result, investing in the implementation and refinement of SBM practices can help to create a more conducive learning environment and promote educational excellence in the Iloilo division.

As a whole, the degree of SBM practice seems to have a minor effect on teachers' assessments of the learning environment, even though the school category may not have substantial implications. Improving educational quality and encouraging student success within the Division of Iloilo can be accomplished by stressing the vitality of developing supportive learning environments in all schools and giving top priority to the implementation of efficient SBM practices.

School Heads' Perceived Prevailing Learning Environment

Understanding what connects school characteristics, such as school category and School-Based Management (SBM) level of practice, and school heads' perceptions of the prevailing learning environment is critical for identifying factors determining educational leadership performance in the Division of Iloilo. This study uncovers insights into the dynamics shaping leadership practices and educational outcomes across various types of schools and SBM practices by investigating how these systemic variables are associated with school heads' perceptions of the learning environment. This can be used to inform strategic decision-making and resource allocation to improve overall educational quality and promote student achievement.

Comparatively analogous to teachers (in Table 2), school heads show weak and moderate non-significant associations between their perceived prevailing learning environment and schools' characteristics such as school category ($V=0.137$, $p=0.535$) and SBM level of practice ($V=0.264$, $p=0.098$), respectively. Most of them ($f=67$) report to be having a highly conducive schools by observation; i.e., regardless to whether the school is small, medium, or large, or to either they are at a Level I, II, or III SBM practice.

The ranging weak and moderate non-significant associations between school heads' perceived prevailing learning environment and school characteristics, such as school category and SBM level of practice, indicate that these institutional factors may not have significant consequences on school heads' perceptions in the Division of Iloilo (in Table 2). Despite this paucity of association, the majority of school heads report having highly conducive schools upon observation, indicating a consistent commitment to creating optimal learning environments regardless of school size or SBM practice level.

Regarding the school category, the non-significant association reveals that the type of school (small, medium, or large) has no substantial contribution to school heads' perceptions of the learning environment. This suggests that they can adapt their leadership practices and strategies to create conducive learning environments regardless of school size. It is imperative that school heads give priority to initiatives that strive to establish a positive and supportive learning environment in schools of all sizes, even though the school category may not have an important bearing on school heads' perceptions of the learning environment. This entails putting in place efficient leadership techniques, giving staff members enough resources, and encouraging teamwork to guarantee that all students have equal opportunity to a high-quality educational experience.

Similarly, the moderately non-significant association with SBM level of practice indicates that the implementation of SBM practices may not be linked to school heads' perceptions of the learning environment. However, the tendency for most school heads to report highly conducive schools across all SBM practice levels suggests that effective leadership practices may play a more significant role in creating optimal learning environments than the specific level of SBM implementation. Although, schools should continue to invest in the implementation and refinement of SBM practices to enhance educational effectiveness and promote student success. Effective leadership is crucial in guiding SBM initiatives and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within schools, regardless of the specific SBM practice level.

Entirely, while school category and SBM level of practice may not be significantly associated to school heads' perceptions of the learning environment, effective leadership practices are paramount in creating conducive learning environments and promoting educational excellence within the Division of Iloilo. By prioritizing initiatives aimed at enhancing leadership effectiveness and supporting continuous improvement efforts, schools can ensure optimal learning experiences for all students.

Implications to Educational Leaders

The findings highlight the critical role of effective leadership in establishing the school learning environment, underlining the need to reinforce SBM practices and build a pleasant educational environment across all school categories. According to Usman and Madudili (2019), educational leaders must prioritize developing inclusive and supportive learning environments that meet the requirements of different students. A conducive learning environment extends beyond academic instruction to include the physical, emotional, and social aspects of student well-being (Handayani et al., 2020). Leaders should strive to balance these dimensions by providing

enough resources, encouraging collaboration, and maintaining a supportive school culture in order to encourage holistic student development.

Furthermore, administrators must address inequities in SBM implementation, as schools with greater SBM levels are thought to provide more conducive settings. This finding is consistent with Fonllem et al. (2020), who stated that the school atmosphere is shaped by institutional, individual, and practical characteristics that separate schools. Educational leaders should invest in training programs for teachers and administrators to improve their ability to effectively integrate SBM practices while ensuring equity among schools. Strengthening SBM not only improves teaching and learning results, but it also develops a school culture that values cooperation, autonomy, and accountability, resulting in long-term increases in educational quality and student success (CFCR, 2020).

Finally, leaders must be aware of external issues that affect the school environment, such as community support and resource distribution. The combination of internal school dynamics and external stimuli shapes both student and teacher experiences (Rasyidah & Wafa, 2020). Leaders should form collaborations with parents, local communities, and government agencies to address systemic issues like infrastructure constraints or financial shortfalls. By taking a holistic approach to school leadership that focuses on improving the physical, social, and psychological dimensions of the learning environment, educators can create spaces that inspire academic excellence, creativity, and personal growth, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of educational leadership in cultivating conducive learning environments in public high schools within the Division of Iloilo. Despite the weak or non-significant associations between school characteristics, such as size and SBM level, and perceptions of the learning environment, the consistent positive outlook from both teachers and school heads underscores the influence of leadership in shaping educational quality. The findings suggest that enhancing SBM practices, prioritizing leadership development, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and fostering a collaborative and supportive school culture are pivotal to improving educational outcomes. These strategies not only address disparities in school performance but also reinforce the systemic and holistic approaches required to sustain a high standard of education. By implementing data-driven and equity-focused initiatives, educational leaders can effectively bridge gaps in educational provision and create an environment conducive to both teacher efficacy and student success, ultimately driving continuous improvement and excellence in the public education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, future research should explore the specific SBM practices that contribute to a more conducive learning environment, particularly in Level II and III schools. A deeper investigation into the mechanisms behind SBM's influence on teachers' perceptions could offer valuable insights. Additionally, the weak association between school category and teachers' perceptions suggests that other factors, such as leadership style, resource availability, or community engagement, may play a role. Research on the role of school leadership in shaping perceptions, especially across different SBM levels, would be valuable, as well as longitudinal studies to track changes over time.

Educational leaders should prioritize strengthening School-Based Management (SBM) practices, particularly in Level I schools, by fostering collaboration, autonomy, and capacity-building among teachers and administrators. Leadership development programs should equip school leaders with advanced skills in resource management and creating positive school cultures. Equitable resource allocation is essential to ensure all schools, regardless of size or SBM level, are well-supported. Additionally, robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented to assess and refine SBM practices and leadership strategies, driving continuous improvement and promoting equity and excellence in education.

Finally, comparative studies across various educational contexts (e.g., urban vs. rural, public vs. private) could help determine whether the findings are generalizable or context-specific. These directions could deepen our

understanding of the factors influencing teachers' perceptions and inform strategies for improving educational environments.

Statements and Declarations:

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval: This study was granted an ethics clearance by the Central Philippine University - Research Ethics and Review Board (CPU-RERB), Jaro, Iloilo, Philippines.

REFERENCES

1. Bandura, A. & Hall, P. (2018). Albert bandura and social learning theory. LEARNING THEORIES FOR EARLY YEARS, 78. <https://www.torrossa.com/gs/resourceProxy?an=5282231&publisher=FZ7200#page=91>
2. CFCR (2020). The effects of a positive school environment. <https://www.cfcrights.org/the-effects-of-a-positive-school-environment/>
3. Fonllem, M., Sing, L., Verdugo, M., Teran, Q., & Barahona, D. (2020). School environments and elementary school children's well-being in Northwestern Mexico. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00510>
4. Gangi, T. A. (2010). School climate and faculty relationships: Choosing an effective assessment measure (Doctoral dissertation, St. John's University).
5. Handayani, H., Sowiyah, & Ridwan, (2020). The shaping of the student character caring for the school environment through the green school movement in SMP Negeri 2 Adiluwih. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1655/1/012115>
6. Kyriakides, L. & Creemers, B. P. (2016). A dynamic perspective on school learning environment and its impact on student learning outcomes. *Assessing contexts of learning: An international perspective*, 355-373.
7. Rasyidah, G. & Wafa, S. (2020). A quantitative assessment of school environment as viewed by teachers. *Heliyon*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04059>
8. Usman & Madudili (2019). Evaluation of the effect of learning environment on students' academic performance in Nigeria. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED602097>
9. Vella, S. A., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2013). The relationship between coach leadership, the coach-athlete relationship, team success, and the positive developmental experiences of adolescent soccer players. *Physical education and sport pedagogy*, 18(5), 549-561.