Decentralization of communication: practices and challenges of integrated schools in Roxas City

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Abstract: The shift towards a more democratic approach in Philippine education has led to significant policy changes designed to empower communities. One key reform is the decentralization of communication, which has greatly influenced how decisions are made, and plans are carried out in schools. This study utilized a case study research design, examined the experiences of 28 teaching and non-teaching personnel, and 4 school heads from 14 integrated schools in the Division of Roxas City. Purposively chosen using exclusion and inclusion criteria. Data collection was done through interview guide questionnaire generated to Google Forms and in-depth interviews conducted via Google Meet. The use of thematic analysis grounded in Merriam and Tisdell's framework, the study highlighted several core communication practices: flexible messaging systems, the use of digital platforms, and collaborative feedback mechanisms. However, participants also pointed to key challenges, including vague directives, limited resources, resistance to change, and difficulties in compliance. As result of these findings, the study proposed a capacity-building plan titled "weCONNECT: Strengthening Decentralized Communication in the Integrated Schools of Roxas City." It aimed to improve communication practices by enhancing protocols equipping school leaders with collaborative tools, encouraging staff adaptability, and supporting further research on decentralized communication.

Keywords: Decentralization of Communication, Practices, Challenges, Integrated Schools, Capacity Building

INTRODUCTION

The progressive democratization of Philippine education has ushered in broad policy reforms focused on deepening student engagement, refining problem-solving skills, and strengthening community participation, thus preparing learners to navigate the demands of a globalized world. Central to these reforms is the concept of decentralization, which has reshaped planning and decision-making processes within the education sector. Republic Act 9155, or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, laid the groundwork by establishing a framework for distributing authority and improving coordination, though educational administrators continue to face substantial challenges in fulfilling these objectives. As noted by scholars like Mwinjuma et al. (2015) and Nurakhir (2016), decentralization involves transferring autonomy to local levels to enhance efficiency, cut costs, secure resources, and enact administrative reforms. Yet, while decentralization theoretically promotes responsiveness and institutional ownership, its practical implementation is often hampered by ambiguities in roles, inactive bureaucratic bodies, and lack of transparency (Channa, 2015).

Further complicating the picture are the four recognized forms of decentralization—deconcentration, delegation, devolution, and privatization—which, while offering structural

flexibility, have also sparked debates about political influence, inconsistency, and the lingering dominance of central guidelines (Fika &Tenriawaru, 2015). The challenges extend to curriculum decisions, school management, and organizational coherence, where narrow interpretations of autonomy often undermine the broader goals of decentralization. Devas (cited in Harris &Deflamis, 2016) underscores the importance of robust information systems and communication channels to ensure the successful implementation of decentralization efforts, emphasizing that sustainable education management is tightly linked to effective communication practices (Hyrslova et al., 2017).

In parallel, the rise of integrated schools in the Philippines represents an innovative extension of decentralization, combining elementary to senior high school education under a unified structure to promote accessibility and foster learning communities. Studies by Villanueva et al. (2024), Heleta (2016), and Soliva and Escote (2024) highlight how these schools encourage student collaboration, critical thinking, and the reintegration of dropouts by reducing physical and logistical barriers to education. Despite their promise, integrated schools face numerous operational challenges, including overcrowding, infrastructure deficiencies, limited resources, and the need for effective leadership to coordinate expanded roles (Baker-Doyle, 2021; Capulso et al., 2024).

While decentralization and integrated school models offer meaningful opportunities for educational advancement, they are not without pitfalls, particularly regarding communication gaps that hinder efficient implementation. Addressing these gaps is critical for optimizing administrative practices, improving the management of directives, and ensuring the sustainability of reforms. Drawing on two years of professional experience in the Department of Education (DepEd), the researcher observed that although decentralized communication is technically present, it is frequently applied in irrelevant contexts, underutilized in critical operations, and often entangled with issues of misaligned directives and inconsistent school-level responses. These observations formed the impetus for conducting this study, which seeks to explore how decentralization and integrated school systems can be more effectively aligned with the unique challenges and realities of the Philippine educational landscape.

Problem Statement
The study aimed to describe the practices and challenges in the decentralization of communication in integrated schools in Roxas City. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the practices on decentralization of communication of Integrated schools in Roxas City?;

2. What are the challenges on decentralization of communication of Integrated schools in Roxas City?; and

3. What output can be produced from the results of the study?

Theoretical framework
The epistemological perspective that applied in this study was systems theory. This helps to understand how different parts of integrated schools such as the administration, teachers, and non-teaching personnel interact and communicate with one another. According to Schelbe et al. (2018), through application of system theory for program planning and evaluation provides a structure that identifies components for interventions and a deep understanding of the parts of the planning process.

This approach helps to discover how communication practices evolve within the school's structure and how each part influences the others. Beyond individual-level applications, network analysis enables the exploration of deeper connections among educational entities such as schools, university faculties, and degree programs. As cited by Pinheiro and Vasconcelos (2025), applying network science to the study of educational systems helps uncover hidden structures, identify key components (such as central academic programs and institutions), assess patterns of preference consistency, and detect direct competition among higher education providers. These insights contribute to more effective interventions, strategic decision-making, and policy development within the educational landscape (Candia&Gorodnichenko, 2023).

This study also focused on the decentralization of communication in education; therefore, organizational communication theory was applied. According to Sharma et al. (2016), when staff members are satisfied with communication in their workplace, they are more likely to also be satisfied with their jobs. This also leads to the fact that communication significantly impacts job satisfaction and functions among members of the organization.

Likewise, the transactional model of communication prompted the concurrent process; the sender and receiver are both responsible for the effects and effectiveness of communication. According to Siahaan and Sihotang (2021) the direction of communication should be bound to the meaning sent from one person to another, this meaning is obtained through feedback from the sender and receiver. Therefore, people construct meaning during communication driven by each person's past experiences adopting the present and actual cases and functions.

Furthermore, the media Richness theory (MRT) explores how different communication media vary in their capacity to convey information effectively. In the study of Ishii and Carr (2019), this theory derives from objectively viewed media characteristics and the use of media platforms. The characteristics and attitudes exposed in this process are also affected by factors such as experiences regarding the relative information posed in the media support. Therefore, this theory implies that media use might also affect the persons` perspective posits in their experiences and present roles and responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

Research design
The study employed a qualitative research design, recognizing the perspectives of individuals as essential elements for gaining a deeper and broader understanding of the factors affecting the focus of the study. This approach aims to examine and understand variations in participants' experiences through meaningful perspectives (Creswell et al., 2018). It is used to further explore barriers related to emotions, thoughts, and, most importantly, how these factors influence a person's life. A key characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality based on their shared experiences and interactions with the world around them (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016, as cited in Beldia, 2024).

The qualitative research design serves to address gaps that cannot be fully captured through numerical values alone. Instead, it provides a deeper understanding of intangible concepts, particularly human perspectives. It explores patterns of interaction and examines the underlying attributes of actions and theories expressed in qualitative data (Tesch, 2013 as cited in Beldia, 2024). This approach was particularly relevant to situations in schools, especially regarding communication, where certain issues cannot be measured solely by numerical data. Rather, they require a deeper exploration to identify the gap between actual practices and the underlying

challenges experienced by individuals within an organization — in this case, the integrated schools in Roxas City.

Furthermore, the qualitative inquiry employed was a case study research design, which focuses on gaining a deep understanding of the phenomenon obtained by a group of people having the same set of environments working on a specific function that influences the broader scope of the subject. This helps to investigate the guided role of individuals in an organization specifically on how effective their practices are involving educational improvements through their collaborations and leadership drive in curriculum reform (Ainin et al., 2025). This was accomplished through qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, which are essential in identifying areas that significantly impact the gaps or implications related to the phenomenon. Moreover, Nassaji as cited by Ainin et al. (2025), explains that qualitative research takes a natural and open-ended approach to studying non-numerical data, rather than trying to control or measure variables, the main purpose is to deeply understand and explore experiences or phenomena. It focuses more on how things develop and the patterns that emerge, rather than just the result. This type of research is rooted in context and interpretation. It helps us see how people make sense of their world and how they experience and understand their social reality. The insights gained from their experiences can also inform the development of policies and practices that effectively address the needs of vulnerable populations (Butler &Yendol-Hoppey, 2024).

The practices of integrated schools serve as an important indication of how various aspects of school culture and policies relate to the concept of decentralized communication. Actions are being taken or have already been implemented by school personnel to fulfill their respective roles and responsibilities. These practices highlight the need for a well-structured protocol that can provide opportunities for the organization to improve and advance in the areas where they are engaged.

Likewise, the challenges faced by integrated schools affect the effectiveness of decentralized communication. These challenges often involve complexities in coordination, resource allocation, and communication strategies, which can significantly hinder the institution's growth and development. The experiences of those involved highlight the profound implications of these issues, emphasizing the need to address them through thoughtful and strategic approaches. By overcoming these obstacles, schools can establish more efficient communication systems, creating an environment that promotes growth, collaboration, and continuous organizational improvement.

Locale of Study
This research was conducted in selected integrated schools in Roxas City.

Respondents of the study
In this study, participants were deliberately selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. Individuals who met the established criteriasuch as teaching staff, non-teaching personnel, and selected school heads were identified to provide in-depth insights into the practices and challenges on decentralized communication in integrated schools in Roxas City.

Selection and Description of Respondents

Stratified proportional random sampling was employed in the selection of the participants where everyone in the population was given an equal chance of being selected as a sample. They were selected at random from their respective school district using the lottery technique. All the names of the MAPEH Teachers in each participating school district was written in a slip of paper, rolled and placed in a box designated for each school. The desired sample size was determined using Slovin's formula. The required number of sample-participants was drawn from each box, those whose names were drawn and included in the sample.

Data Gathering Instruments

This study aimed to understand the participants' perspectives on the practices and challenges they encounter within their respective organizations, particularly regarding the decentralization of communication, their guided roles, and functions. Therefore, the use of research instruments in the form of interview guide questionnaires was utilized. There were two different questionnaires made by the researcher (1) to understand the experiences of teaching and non-teaching personnel, and (2) to the selected school heads. These guide questions comprised a series of carefully crafted inquiries and prompts designed to elicit in-depth responses.

The first interview guide questionnaire was crafted for the teaching and non-teaching personnel and then generated through Google Forms and the survey link was distributed to designated representatives of each integrated school. Meanwhile, the second guide questionnaire was used for in-depth interviews with selected school heads, allowing for a deeper exploration of their perspectives and experiences.

These guide questionnaires were designed to steer the interview in a focused yet flexible manner, allowing for a conversational approach to gathering inputs in the study Merriam and Tisdell, 2016 as cited by Beldia (2024).

The researcher-made interview guide served as the primary tool for gathering qualitative data essential to this study. The guided questionnaire underwent review and approval by the advisory committee before administration. Ultimately, this research instrument was used to gather data from 28 teaching and non-teaching personnel, and 4 selected school heads.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were collected using Google Forms for teaching and non-teaching personnel, with guide questions specifically designed for them. Likewise, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected school heads from integrated schools in Roxas City. The data collection process spanned approximately two months from December 21, 2024, to February 2025 with interviews scheduled according to the participants' availability, including weekends when necessary. This flexible approach ensured that the research was carried out in a manner that respected and accommodated the participants' responsibilities and commitments. According to Tesch, 2013 as cited by Beldia (2024), qualitative data should be gathered in settings and timeframes that are convenient and conducive for participants, and consistent with the progressive, responsive, emergent, and interpretative nature of qualitative research.

In this study, data collection was carried out within the participants' respective school environments or other locations of their choice, fostering a sense of comfort and openness during the online interviews. This setting allowed participants to share their experiences and insights regarding communication practices and challenges within the decentralized educational

framework. The researcher carefully followed ethical considerations, ensuring that all interviews were conducted in a respectful, confidential, and contextually appropriate manner, reinforcing the study's commitment to capturing authentic experiences.

Data Analysis Procedure
This study utilized qualitative data analysis, which involves the process of reviewing, synthesizing, and interpreting data to describe and explain the social realities being studied (Tesch, 2013; Merriam, 2016 as cited by Beldia, 2024). According to Merriam and Tisdell, 2016 as cited by Beldia (2024), data analysis is the process of classifying and interpreting linguistic material to draw insights into both implicit and explicit dimensions of meaning-making, as well as the underlying structures represented in the data.

Thematic Analysis was used to identify common patterns in the practices and challenges of decentralized communication in integrated schools in Roxas City. This process follows the ideas of Merriam and Tisdell 2014; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss 2015 as cited by Beldia (2024) on building themes from data. The responses from teaching and non-teaching personnel, as well as selected school principals, were carefully reviewed through transcription, note-taking, categorizing, and theme development. Axial coding (also called analytical coding) was applied to go beyond simple descriptions and understand the deeper meaning of the responses (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Richards, 2015; Beldia (2024). The patterns that emerged were organized into a master list of themes, which served as a guide for analyzing the participants' experiences with decentralized communication.

Merriam and Tisdell, 2016 as cited by Beldia (2024), emphasized that data analysis should align with the study's purpose and framework. In this study, data analysis followed four main steps: (1) coding data to identify patterns and insights related to the study's objectives; (2) identifying emerging themes that capture shared experiences of decentralized communication in schools; (3) analyzing individual data units to ensure alignment with the study's purpose; and (4) applying axial coding to refine themes using a comparative approach. This structured process led to a deeper understanding of how decentralized communication is practiced, interpreted and managed in integrated schools in Roxas City.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Profile of the respondents
A total of 32 participants were involved in the study, comprising various roles within the school system. The majority were teachers (n = 21), followed by school heads (n = 4), record section officers (n = 3), LIS coordinators (n = 2), and liaison officers (n = 2). This distribution highlights that the perspectives gathered were primarily from classroom-level educators, with supporting insights from key administrative personnel responsible for school records, information systems, and communication liaison roles. The range of participants provided a well-rounded view of communication practices and challenges across different functional areas within the schools.

Practices on decentralization of communication of integrated schools in Roxas City
The first statement of the problem focuses on the practices on decentralization of communication of integrated schools in Roxas City. The discussion of analytical findings is divided into two parts that highlight the different roles from teaching and non-teaching to selected school heads to fully explore the importance of decentralized communication according to their designated roles.

This study comprehensively explored how decentralization of communication is practiced among teaching and non-teaching personnel and school heads in integrated schools in Roxas City. Drawing from open-ended surveys, interviews, and thematic analysis, the research revealed how decentralization enhances school governance through flexibility, technology integration, collaborative processes, and adaptive leadership.

For teaching and non-teaching personnel, three major themes emerged: flexible communication, adoption of digital platforms, and collaboration in communication. Flexible communication was shown to empower timely information sharing, efficient management of change, and participatory decision-making. Teachers and staff relied on tools like group chats, Facebook pages, and learning management systems to swiftly disseminate memos, updates, and directives, allowing for rapid adjustments and community involvement. Digital platforms such as school management systems and the Learner Information System further strengthened decentralization by ensuring systematic monitoring and providing real-time access to critical information. Meanwhile, collaborative practices such as feedback loops, shared responsibility, and adaptability highlighted the human-centered nature of decentralized communication, where trust, teamwork, and proactive adjustment play essential roles in sustaining school operations and improving educational outcomes.

Among school heads, four key themes shaped their leadership approaches: communication strategies, policy implementation and adaptation, digital integration, and decision-making. Communication strategies involved structured information dissemination through formal and informal channels, effective delegation of roles, and contextualized coordination, ensuring that central directives were translated efficiently into school-level action. Policy implementation and adaptation reflected how school leaders balanced structured compliance, orientation and training, flexibility, adaptability, and monitoring, enabling them to navigate evolving educational policies while maintaining performance and accountability. Digital integration emerged as a transformative force, with school heads leveraging social media, text messaging, and online platforms to enhance responsiveness and administrative efficiency—especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Decision-making, meanwhile, underscored the importance of interpreting directives thoughtfully, exercising discretion in local contexts, and engaging stakeholders in collaborative planning, ensuring that decisions aligned with both national goals and community needs.

Across both personnel and leadership levels, the study emphasized that decentralized communication is not merely about distributing tasks or information but about creating responsive, inclusive, and contextually grounded systems. It revealed that successful decentralization requires robust communication channels, technological support, collaborative governance, clear policy adaptation, and continuous monitoring to prevent information gaps, manage change effectively, and maintain alignment with institutional objectives.

Ultimately, the synthesis shows that decentralization in Roxas City's integrated schools is a dynamic process shaped by both structural reforms and human-centered practices. While challenges such as resistance to change, role ambiguity, and resource constraints persist, the combined efforts of teachers, staff, and school heads—anchored in clear communication, shared leadership, digital tools, and adaptive strategies—strengthen the resilience and effectiveness of the educational system, supporting the broader goal of delivering quality, responsive, and inclusive education.

Challenges on decentralization of communication of integrated schools in Roxas City
The study carefully explored the second statement of the problem, which focused on identifying and understanding the challenges encountered in the decentralization of communication within integrated schools in Roxas City. By dividing the discussion into two distinct parts, the research examined the perspectives of both teaching and non-teaching personnel and selected school heads, using thematic analysis and triangulation to fully illuminate their real-world experiences. For the teaching and non-teaching personnel, three major themes emerged: communication issues, resource constraints, and roles and functions. Communication issues were at the forefront, with participants highlighting how vague directives, misinterpretations, and information overload disrupted school operations. The over-reliance on informal platforms like group chats, combined with unclear or overly technical language, often led to confusion, duplication of efforts, and increased stress, reducing productivity and morale.

Resource constraints further exacerbated these challenges, as teachers and staff faced limited time, insufficient funding, inadequate materials, and a lack of technical training, making it difficult to implement decentralized policies effectively. Many were required to manage overlapping roles, serving not only as educators but also as compliance officers, advisers, and event organizers, often without the necessary preparation or support. This multitasking not only diluted the quality of their work but also led to fatigue and burnout. Alongside these, the issue of poorly defined transitioning roles surfaced, where staff moving into new administrative or non-teaching positions faced emotional stress, uncertainty, and decreased confidence due to unclear expectations and a lack of structured guidance. Together, these challenges underscored that successful decentralization relies not just on the delegation of tasks but on clear communication, realistic workloads, sufficient resourcing, and well-managed role definitions.

From the perspective of the selected school heads, three additional themes were identified: delayed and inconsistent communication, difficulties in implementation, and multitasking and workload conflicts. School heads expressed frustration over receiving last-minute or contradictory directives from higher offices, which disrupted planning and created confusion among teachers. Such delays placed enormous pressure on leaders, forcing them to make rushed decisions while balancing the competing demands of administrative compliance and school operations. Difficulties in implementation also arose due to abrupt policy changes, such as curriculum revisions, which restricted the schools' capacity to exercise local independence. Rather than empowering leaders, these sudden shifts often left them in reactive positions, struggling to align national mandates with community needs. Additionally, multitasking and workload conflicts created further stress, as school heads were forced to manage an overwhelming array of responsibilities without sufficient institutional support. Emotional strain, interpersonal conflicts, and the unrealistic expectation of perfect compliance compounded the pressures, reducing leadership effectiveness and threatening the goals of decentralized governance.

In response to these multilayered challenges, the study produced the project weCONNECT: Strengthening Decentralized Communication in the Integrated Schools of Roxas City. This initiative, directly informed by the research findings, was designed as both a technological and capacity-building intervention. weCONNECT proposes the adoption of structured digital tools, such as Google Workspace, along with clear communication protocols, escalation procedures, and tailored workflow charts that reflect the specific needs of Roxas City's integrated schools. Crucially, the project emphasizes not just the use of digital tools but also the alignment of human roles and responsibilities, providing training, simulations, and real-

time support to ensure personnel are equipped and confident in their communication practices. By addressing the deeper issues of role clarity, accountability, and collaborative culture, weCONNECT aims to transform communication from a persistent challenge into a strategic asset, strengthening the connection between schools and division offices and fostering a more resilient, efficient, and inclusive educational environment.

Ultimately, the synthesis reveals that decentralization, while promising greater autonomy and responsiveness, carries inherent risks when it is not supported by clear communication systems, sufficient resources, and empathetic leadership. Addressing the challenges identified in the study requires more than issuing directives; it demands integrated solutions that combine technology, training, structured support, and a deep understanding of the human and operational realities faced by schools. Through the implementation of projects like weCONNECT, Roxas City's integrated schools can move toward a future where decentralized communication enhances—not hinders—their capacity to deliver high-quality education and achieve meaningful institutional progress.

CONCLUSION

The practices on decentralization of communication among teaching and non-teaching personnel in integrated schools in Roxas City centered around three major themes. First, flexible communication emerged, with subthemes of timely information delivery, efficiency in adapting to changes, and empowerment in decision-making. Second, the adoption of digital platforms played a crucial role, reflected in the use of group chats and school management systems. Third, collaboration in communication surfaced through the establishment of feedback mechanisms and the sharing of communication responsibilities across personnel.

For the selected school heads, four major themes shaped their communication practices. These included: (1) communication strategies, which involved information dissemination, use of digital platforms, delegation of communication roles, coordination in meetings, and contextualization of directives; (2) policy implementation and adaptation, which covered structured compliance measures, orientation and training, flexibility in implementation, and adaptability to policy shifts; (3) digital integration, centered on the use of online communication tools; and (4) decision-making, which involved interpreting directives, exercising discretion in implementation, and engaging in collaborative decision-making processes.

Regarding the challenges faced by teaching and non-teaching personnel, four major themes were identified. These included: (1) communication issues, which encompassed vague information, misinterpretation, and information overload; (2) resource constraints, covering time limitations, lack of financial and material resources, and personnel skill gaps; (3) resistance to change, highlighted by reluctance among personnel; (4) compliance issues, marked by difficulty in meeting compliance demands; and (5) roles and functions, which involved overlapping responsibilities and the challenges of transitioning roles.

For the selected school heads, three major themes were identified as primary challenges in decentralization. These were: (1) delayed and inconsistent communication, with subthemes of late dissemination of directives, contradictory instructions, and incomplete or unclear guidance; (2) difficulties in implementation, including restrictions on school independence and sudden changes in policy expectations; and (3) multitasking and workload conflicts, focusing on the burdens of administrative tasks and emerging conflicts among subordinates.

In response to these multi-level challenges and insights, the researcher conceptualized and designed weCONNECT: Strengthening Decentralized Communication in the Integrated Schools of Roxas City. This initiative aims to provide a structured communication framework supported by both training and digital tools, ensuring that schools are better equipped to handle the complexities of decentralized communication. By addressing the identified gaps and challenges, weCONNECT seeks to enhance clarity, coordination, and resilience in communication practices across the integrated schools in the city, ultimately improving both administrative efficiency and educational outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are provided: First, the Department of Education may give serious attention to how communication works within its system. This is for making sure that policies and guidelines are carried out properly across different offices and schools. Having clear and consistent information helps members from top officials to school personnel stay on the same page. Also, identification of problems or weaknesses in policies are to be implemented to make improvements and stay focused on achieving its goals more effectively.

Second, school leaders may provide right tools and strategies such the use of weCONNECT concept to encourage collaboration within their schools. This can help them clearly identify and address communication gaps that might be slowing down progress. Thus, this inclusive partnerships between schools and their communities may be implemented to create a more cohesive and supportive environment for all stakeholders.

Third, teachers and non-teaching personnel may develop open-mindedness and the ability to adapt to sudden changes in plans and expectations within the organization. This study provided valuable insight into the role they played within the education system. The findings may help to enhance their roles, functions, mapping, and decision-making processes to better integrate their offices into the overall operations of the Department of Education.

Lastly, future researchers may enhance understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of decentralization of communication. They may incorporate important variables and elements that would examine alternative perspectives in the educational sector and other possible factors inherent in decentralization.

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