

Decision-making practices of school principals and their impact on teachers' professionalism: A study of schools in the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System, Nueva Ecija

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Abstract

This study investigated the decision-making practices of school administrators and the professionalism of teachers in selected schools of the Apo Jose Catholic Educational Systems in Nueva Ecija. Specifically, it examined teachers' perceptions of their principals' decision-making along routine, adaptive, innovative, and participative dimensions and assessed teachers' professionalism in terms of competency, commitment, self-discipline, expertise, integrity, and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, the study explored the relationship between principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism and proposed targeted interventions to enhance both constructs. A total of 57 teachers, representing 83.82% of the teaching population, and nine school administrators, composed of four principals and five head teachers, participated in the study. Data were collected through validated questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the strength and significance of relationships. Findings revealed that teachers perceived their principals' decision-making practices as very good, with the highest ratings observed in routine and participative decision-making. Teachers' professionalism was found to be very high, particularly in self-discipline, integrity, and interpersonal skills, while competency, commitment, and expertise were rated as high. Statistical analysis indicated a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.785$) between principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism, highlighting the significant influence of administrative leadership on professional conduct. Based on these findings, the researcher designed Organization Development Intervention Programs (ODIP) to reinforce decision-making practices and professional standards. The study underscores the importance of collaborative and ethical administrative leadership in fostering teacher professionalism, promoting a culture of excellence, and enhancing overall school performance. educational management intervention, classroom decision-making styles, human relations skills.

Keywords: decision making, professionalism, organization development

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1. Introduction

Globalization has brought rapid and complex transformations across economic, political, cultural, and social spheres. These changes have significantly influenced the education sector, creating a demand for adaptive and strategic leadership within schools. School leaders, particularly principals, are now required to make timely and effective decisions, while teachers are expected to uphold high levels of professionalism to meet the evolving demands of the educational landscape. The success and effectiveness of schools depend largely on the interplay between leaders' decision-making practices and teachers' professional conduct. Principals' decisions directly influence instructional quality, staff collaboration, and student outcomes, while teachers' professionalism ensures that educational goals are met with competence, integrity, and commitment. In this context, decision-making and professionalism are mutually reinforcing elements that shape the overall educational environment.

In the post-pandemic era, the quality of education in the Philippines and around the globe has become increasingly dependent on the capability of school leaders to make informed, timely, and ethical decisions, as well as on teachers' ability to maintain professional standards in their practice. Lunenberg and Ornstein (2013) highlight that decision-making is the "brain" of leadership, guiding organizational actions and directly impacting the success of schools. Effective decision-making encompasses various practices, including adaptive, innovative, routine, and participative approaches, each of which contributes to the smooth functioning and responsiveness of educational institutions. Teacher professionalism, on the other hand, extends beyond technical competency. Altinkurt and Yilmaz (2014) describe professionalism as the internalization of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that guide meticulous work, ethical conduct, and the fulfillment of responsibilities. In education, professionalism is demonstrated through teachers' subject mastery, instructional expertise, commitment to continuous learning, integrity, self-discipline, and positive interpersonal interactions. Together, the professionalism of teachers and the decision-making practices of principals create a dynamic framework that sustains educational effectiveness.

The Apo Jose Catholic Educational Systems of Nueva Ecija exemplify an institution where leadership and professionalism are central to its mission. Grounded in Catholic values, these schools aim to develop both the academic and moral dimensions of students, emphasizing holistic education. Principals in this system are responsible for making decisions that affect not only operational and instructional matters but also the overall development of teachers and students. Similarly, teachers are expected to embody professionalism by applying their expertise responsibly, demonstrating commitment to students' welfare, and maintaining ethical standards. Despite the recognized importance of leadership decision-making and teacher professionalism, limited studies have examined their interplay in the context of private Catholic educational institutions in Nueva Ecija. Understanding how principals' decision-making practices influence teacher professionalism can provide valuable insights into creating effective and responsive educational environments. This study aims to explore these dimensions by examining the decision-making approaches of school leaders and the professional behaviors of teachers within the Apo Jose Catholic Educational Systems of Nueva Ecija.

Motivated by her firsthand experience as a teacher-leader in the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System, the researcher seeks to answer key questions: How do principals make decisions in response to instructional, administrative, and community challenges? To what extent do teachers demonstrate professionalism in their practice? How do these two elements interact to shape the school's overall effectiveness? By addressing these questions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of educational leadership and teacher professionalism in the context of Catholic schools in Nueva Ecija. The following questions will be tested in this study.

1. How do the respondents perceived their principals decision making along the dimensions of adaptive, innovative, routine, and participative decision making practices?
2. How do the respondents perceived their professionalism along the dimensions of competency, commitment, self-discipline, expertise, integrity, and interpersonal skills?
3. Is there a significant correlation between the principals' decision making practices and perceived professionalism of the respondents?

2. Related Literature

This research aims to examine the relationship between the decision-making practices of school principals and the professionalism of teachers within the educational context of the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System in Nueva Ecija. In the modern educational landscape, school leaders play a critical role in shaping the operational and instructional effectiveness of schools. Decisions made by principals not only affect administrative efficiency but also influence teachers' work performance, professional conduct, and overall school climate. Likewise, teachers' professionalism—manifested through competence, ethical behavior, commitment, and pedagogical expertise—contributes to the success of the educational system. Understanding the interplay between leadership decision-making and teacher professionalism is essential for promoting quality education and responsive school management.

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon Herbert A. Simon's Decision-Making Theory, which underscores the critical role of decision-making in organizational settings. Simon (1960) conceptualizes decision-making as a structured process in which leaders identify problems, gather and evaluate information, develop alternatives, and select the most appropriate course of action. Effective decision-making requires rationality, foresight, and a clear understanding of the organizational goals and the needs of stakeholders. Within schools, principals' ability to make timely, ethical, and well-informed decisions directly impacts instructional quality, teacher motivation, and student outcomes. This study utilizes Simon's theory to examine how different decision-making approaches—adaptive, participative, routine, and innovative—affect teachers' professional behavior and performance.

Complementing Simon's perspective, this research also draws from the Human Relations Theory, as proposed by Elton Mayo. While originally developed to address workplace efficiency, the theory emphasizes the importance of understanding human behavior, interpersonal relationships, and group dynamics in professional settings. Mayo (1933) argues that effective leadership considers not only tasks and procedures but also the needs, motivations, and interactions of individuals within the organization. In the context of education, this suggests that teachers' professionalism is influenced by leadership practices, communication, and the extent to which they are engaged in decision-making processes. By integrating the principles of the Human Relations Theory, the study highlights the human-centered aspects of school leadership and explores how principals' decisions affect teachers' morale, commitment, and professional conduct.

Decision-making is widely recognized as one of the most complex and critical responsibilities of school leaders. Educational institutions are dynamic environments where decisions regarding curriculum implementation, resource allocation, classroom management, and student welfare must be made continuously. Poor decisions can disrupt teaching processes, demotivate staff, and negatively affect student learning outcomes. Conversely, strategic and participatory decision-making can enhance teachers' sense of ownership, professional growth, and ethical engagement with their work. According to Ngussa and Gabriel (2017), rational administrative decision-making involves the careful evaluation of alternatives, consideration of possible outcomes, and alignment with institutional goals to ensure optimal results. Principals who adopt informed and transparent decision-making practices create conditions that encourage professionalism and instructional excellence.

Teacher professionalism encompasses a wide range of behaviors, attitudes, and skills that enable educators to

meet the demands of modern schooling. Altinkurt and Yılmaz (2014) define professionalism as the internalization of ethical principles, technical competence, responsibility, and accountability in one's work. Professional teachers are committed to continuous learning, exhibit integrity in their interactions, and demonstrate the ability to implement instructional strategies effectively. In the era of globalization and technological advancement, teacher professionalism also includes the capacity to integrate innovative teaching methods, utilize digital tools, and adapt to evolving educational trends (Cappa, 2020; Syahroni et al., 2020). This research considers professionalism not only as individual competence but also as a collective standard that influences the learning environment, student engagement, and the overall reputation of the school.

Recent educational developments, including the widespread adoption of digital technologies and shifts in societal expectations, have intensified the need for professional and competent teaching staff. Teachers are increasingly expected to design student-centered learning experiences, develop personalized instructional materials, and utilize e-learning platforms effectively. Fitriyah (2019) emphasizes that teacher quality and professional development are essential for addressing contemporary educational challenges, including technological integration, curriculum reform, and the holistic development of learners. By examining teachers' professionalism in relation to principals' decision-making practices, this study seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which leadership strategies enhance or impede teachers' capacity to perform effectively in a modern educational context.

The Apo Jose Catholic Educational System in Nueva Ecija serves as a significant case for this investigation. As a faith-based institution, it integrates Catholic values into its educational philosophy, emphasizing holistic student development, moral formation, and community engagement. Principals within this system hold responsibilities not only for administrative management but also for nurturing teachers' professional growth and ethical standards. Their decisions influence curriculum delivery, staff development programs, teacher collaboration, and the overall pedagogical quality of the school. Likewise, teachers are expected to uphold professionalism in their teaching practice, embodying ethical conduct, subject-matter expertise, and commitment to student welfare. The alignment between leadership decisions and teacher professionalism is therefore critical to the system's educational effectiveness and faith-centered mission. This study also addresses an important gap in the literature regarding the interplay between leadership decision-making and teacher professionalism in private Catholic educational institutions. While studies on teacher professionalism and leadership practices exist broadly, few focus on how principals' decision-making specifically impacts the professional behaviors and attitudes of teachers in faith-based schools in the Philippines. By focusing on the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System, this research contributes contextualized insights into how school leaders can enhance teacher performance and professional standards through effective decision-making practices.

The research examines four dimensions of decision-making: adaptive, routine, participative, and innovative. Adaptive decision-making refers to the leader's ability to respond effectively to unexpected challenges or changes in the educational environment. Routine decision-making involves the efficient handling of recurring administrative and instructional tasks. Participative decision-making emphasizes the inclusion of teachers and staff in identifying solutions and planning initiatives. Innovative decision-making focuses on implementing creative strategies and practices to improve teaching, learning, and institutional operations. By analyzing these dimensions, the study investigates which decision-making practices are most closely associated with high levels of teacher professionalism. In line with this, the study conceptualizes teacher professionalism as encompassing competence, ethical conduct, commitment to continuous learning, interpersonal skills, and adherence to educational standards. Professionalism is viewed as both an individual attribute and a collective culture within the school that supports instructional quality and student development. Understanding the connection between principals' decision-making approaches and teacher professionalism can inform practical strategies for leadership development, teacher training, and policy formulation in educational institutions.

In conclusion, the research aims to provide empirical evidence on how the decision-making practices of school principals influence teachers' professionalism within the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System in Nueva Ecija.

By integrating Herbert Simon's Decision-Making Theory and Elton Mayo's Human Relations Theory, the study emphasizes both the rational, strategic aspects of leadership and the human-centered considerations necessary for fostering professional growth. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for school leaders, educators, and policymakers, promoting effective leadership, ethical practice, and professional excellence in faith-based educational settings.

3. Methodology

Research Design. This study adopted a convergent mixed methods design to examine the relationship between school principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism in the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System, Nueva Ecija. The design involved the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by separate analyses and integration during interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guetterman et al., 2019). Quantitative data measured principals' decision-making practices and the levels of teacher professionalism, while qualitative data captured teachers' and administrators' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing leadership decisions and professional conduct. The convergent design provided a holistic understanding of how leadership practices impact professionalism in faith-based schools.

Research Setting. The study was conducted across four schools under the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System: St. Joseph School of San Jose, St. Andrews School of Pantabangan, St. Nicholas Academy of Carranglan, and Sacred Heart Academy of Lupao. These schools serve a diverse student population in Nueva Ecija and operate under Catholic educational principles, emphasizing academic excellence, moral formation, and holistic development. The schools vary in student enrollment, teacher composition, and administrative structure, providing a contextually rich environment to examine decision-making practices and professional behavior.

Participants and Sampling. The study involved a total of 66 respondents, comprising 57 teachers and 9 school administrators (4 principals and 5 head teachers). Teacher respondents were selected using simple random sampling to ensure representativeness, accounting for 83.82% of the total teacher population. School administrators were included through purposive sampling. Ethical protocols were observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses.

Research Instruments. Three instruments were employed to gather data:

- **Professionalism Survey Questionnaire** – Adapted from Tumacder (2016), this 60-item instrument measured teacher professionalism across competence, commitment, self-discipline, expertise, integrity, and interpersonal skills. Responses used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) with interpretation: Very High (4.51–5.00), High (3.51–4.50), Fair (2.51–3.50), Low (1.51–2.49), Very Low (1.00–1.50).
- **Decision-Making Practices Questionnaire** – Adapted from Castro (2015), this 40-item instrument assessed principals' routine, adaptive, participative, and innovative decision-making practices as perceived by teachers. Responses used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) with interpretation: Excellent (4.51–5.00), Very Good (3.51–4.50), Good (2.51–3.50), Poor (1.51–2.50), Very Poor (1.00–1.50).
- **Open-Ended Interview Guide** – Developed by the researcher to explore administrators' and teachers' perspectives on decision-making, professional development, and factors influencing teacher professionalism. The guide captured contextual experiences, challenges, and recommendations for improving leadership practices and professional conduct.

Data Collection Procedure. Approval was secured from the school management, facilitated by a recommendation from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Participants were oriented about the study's objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. Questionnaires were personally administered to

teachers and school administrators, and interviews were conducted with administrators to collect qualitative insights. Quantitative data were encoded for statistical analysis, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to extract patterns, perceptions, and experiences related to decision-making and professionalism.

Statistical Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using arithmetic means to determine levels of principals' decision-making practices and teacher professionalism. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed to examine relationships between the two variables, with interpretations guided by Garrett (cited by Turney, 2022):

- 0.00–0.20: negligible relationship
- 0.21–0.40: slight relationship
- 0.41–0.70: substantial relationship
- 0.71–1.00: high relationship

The coefficient of determination (r^2) was calculated to determine the proportion of variance in teacher professionalism explained by principals' decision-making practices. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using QDA Miner Lite, enabling systematic coding, pattern identification, and integration with quantitative results to provide a comprehensive, contextually grounded understanding of leadership and professionalism in the schools. All statistical inferences were tested at $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. Results and Discussion

This study was conducted to describe and analyze the decision-making practices of school administrators and the professionalism of teachers in the Apo Jose Catholic Educational System, Nueva Ecija, covering the academic year 2023–2024. The study was undertaken in four schools: St. Joseph School of San Jose, St. Andrews School of Pantabangan, St. Nicholas Academy of Carranglan, and Sacred Heart Academy of Lupao. Specifically, the research assessed teachers' perceptions of their principals' decision-making along the dimensions of routine, adaptive, innovative, and participative decision-making, as well as their own level of professionalism across competency, commitment, self-discipline, expertise, integrity, and interpersonal skills. The participants consisted of 57 teachers, representing 83.82% of the total 68 teachers in the school system, and 9 school administrators, including 4 principals and 5 head teachers. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive their principals' decision-making practices across routine, adaptive, innovative, and participative dimensions?
2. How do teachers perceive their own professionalism across competency, commitment, self-discipline, expertise, integrity, and interpersonal skills?
3. Is there a significant correlation between principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism?
4. Based on the findings, what organization development interventions can be proposed to enhance decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism?

The following are the significant results of the study.

Decision-Making Practices of School Administrators: The study revealed that teachers perceive their principals' decision-making practices as very good, reflected by a computed grand mean of 4.13. Detailed analysis of the specific dimensions shows that routine decision-making received the highest rating (4.39), followed by participative decision-making (4.17), innovative decision-making (4.05), and adaptive decision-making (3.90). These findings suggest that school administrators effectively balance structured, day-to-day management with flexible and inclusive approaches that engage stakeholders. The high scores in participative and innovative decision-making indicate a leadership style that encourages collaboration, critical thinking, and responsiveness to

emerging challenges in the school environment. Meanwhile, the strong routine decision-making rating reflects consistent and reliable administrative practices that provide stability and predictability, which are essential for maintaining trust and order within the school community.

Teachers' Professionalism: The respondents demonstrated exceptionally high levels of professionalism across multiple domains. Self-discipline (4.53), integrity (4.65), and interpersonal skills (4.54) were rated very high, highlighting the teachers' commitment to ethical conduct, accountability, and effective collaboration. Additional dimensions, including competency (4.09), commitment (4.11), and expertise (4.18), were also rated highly, suggesting that teachers possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and dedication to deliver quality instruction. Collectively, these results indicate that teachers uphold exemplary professional standards not only in their instructional responsibilities but also in their interactions with colleagues, students, and other stakeholders. This level of professionalism fosters a positive learning environment and reflects a strong alignment between personal values and professional expectations.

Correlation Between Decision-Making and Professionalism: Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism, with a computed r-value of 0.785. This value exceeds the critical r-value of 0.246 for 64 degrees of freedom at a 0.05 level of significance, demonstrating a highly significant relationship. This finding underscores the critical role of effective administrative decision-making in shaping teachers' professional behavior, suggesting that inclusive, transparent, and well-structured decisions by school leaders positively influence teacher motivation, ethical conduct, and engagement in their professional duties.

Qualitative Results: The qualitative findings of this study revealed several challenges encountered by teachers in relation to the decision-making practices of school administrators and their own professional development. Respondents consistently highlighted that while principals demonstrated competence in routine and participative decision-making, adaptive and innovative decision-making often faced limitations due to bureaucratic constraints and limited access to resources. Many teachers noted that decisions affecting instructional strategies, curriculum adjustments, and classroom management were occasionally delayed or constrained by administrative procedures, which hindered timely implementation of necessary changes. Some participants shared that the hierarchical nature of decision-making occasionally limited their opportunities for meaningful input, especially in policy adjustments or school improvement initiatives. Despite these challenges, respondents recognized that the overall openness of principals to feedback and consultative processes created a supportive environment, though they emphasized that this consultative approach could be enhanced to encourage more proactive teacher involvement in school-level decisions.

Regarding professionalism, teachers reported facing challenges related to workload pressures, balancing instructional responsibilities with administrative tasks, and adapting to evolving educational standards. While respondents demonstrated strong self-discipline, integrity, and interpersonal skills, they expressed that excessive non-instructional duties sometimes impeded their ability to fully exercise their professional expertise. Several participants indicated that opportunities for continuous professional development were not always aligned with their immediate teaching needs or emerging trends in pedagogy, leading to a sense of occasional stagnation in skill enhancement. Teachers also noted that maintaining high levels of commitment and consistency required deliberate effort, particularly when dealing with diverse student needs and parental expectations, which occasionally generated stress and required resilience.

In response to these challenges, respondents offered practical recommendations to improve both decision-making processes and professional practice within the schools. Teachers suggested that principals could further strengthen participative decision-making by creating structured forums for teacher input, involving them in policy discussions, and providing clear channels for feedback on administrative decisions. They emphasized the need for transparent communication regarding the rationale behind decisions and the expected outcomes, which could foster a stronger sense of shared responsibility and ownership. To address challenges in professionalism, teachers

recommended targeted professional development programs that are responsive to current classroom realities, including workshops on innovative instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and technology integration. Respondents also encouraged initiatives that support work-life balance, such as delegating non-essential administrative tasks and providing mentorship programs to guide less experienced teachers. Additionally, they suggested that recognizing and rewarding professional accomplishments, whether through formal appraisal systems or informal acknowledgment, would motivate teachers to sustain high standards of practice. Participants stressed that fostering a culture of collaboration, peer learning, and ethical practice could further enhance professionalism and promote a positive school climate.

The qualitative findings indicate that while both school administrators and teachers demonstrate strong decision-making abilities and professional standards, there remain structural and procedural barriers that limit the full expression of these capabilities. The respondents' recommendations underscore the importance of collaborative leadership, responsive professional development, and systematic support mechanisms as essential strategies to overcome these challenges. By addressing these concerns, schools can create an environment that not only promotes effective decision-making but also strengthens teacher professionalism, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and a more cohesive, supportive school community.

Development of Intervention Programs: In response to these findings, the researcher developed targeted Organization Development Intervention Programs (ODIP) aimed at enhancing both principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism. These interventions focus on reinforcing areas that require improvement, promoting collaborative leadership, and supporting continuous professional growth among teachers. By aligning leadership strategies with professional development initiatives, these programs aim to create a sustainable framework for improving school performance and fostering a culture of excellence.

5. Conclusions

- Teachers perceive the **decision-making practices of their school administrators** as very good, particularly in routine, adaptive, innovative, and participative approaches.
- Teachers demonstrate **exceptionally high levels of professionalism**, especially in self-discipline, integrity, and interpersonal skills, with high levels also evident in competency, commitment, and expertise.
- There exists a **highly significant positive correlation** between principals' decision-making practices and teachers' professionalism, indicating that effective administrative decisions are associated with enhanced professional behavior among teachers.
- The ODIP designed from the study provides a practical framework for **strengthening decision-making skills and fostering continuous professional development** among teachers.

Recommendations

Enhancing Decision-Making Practices: Build upon the strengths in routine, adaptive, innovative, and participative decision-making by promoting open communication, collaborative problem-solving, and professional development for school administrators. Training in evidence-based decision-making and stakeholder engagement is recommended.

Promoting Professionalism Among Teachers: Create opportunities for continuous professional growth, including workshops, mentorship programs, peer coaching, and skill-enhancement activities. Emphasis should be placed on self-discipline, integrity, interpersonal skills, and pedagogical competency.

Strengthening the Link Between Leadership and Professionalism: Encourage administrators to adopt participative decision-making models that involve teacher input, fostering a culture of collaboration, transparency,

and accountability.

Implementing Organization Development Interventions: Deploy the ODIP developed from the study to target areas needing improvement in decision-making and professionalism. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these interventions are essential to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

Future Research: Conduct longitudinal studies or mixed-methods research to explore additional factors affecting decision-making and professionalism, including teacher motivation, leadership styles, and contextual school factors. Such studies could provide deeper insights into strategies for enhancing educational quality and professional practice in Catholic school settings.

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