



THE ROLE OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP AND HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS SUSTAINABILITY: A STUDY ON PRIVATE NON-SECTARIAN INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Financial stewardship and human resource practices are crucial elements for ensuring the long-term sustainability of private non-sectarian educational institutions. These factors play a particularly important role in the rapidly changing educational landscape. A study conducted in Zambales during the Academic Year 2022 specifically aimed to assess the influence of financial stewardship and human resource management on the sustainability of non-sectarian schools. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to understand the current situation comprehensively. The findings revealed significant variations in financial competence among the schools studied, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Interestingly, the study found that while there were noticeable differences in financial capabilities, aspects like budget control and auditing practices did not show significant disparities across institutions. Moreover, the analysis indicated strong positive correlations between effective financial stewardship and overall school sustainability.

Keywords: Financial stewardship, Human Resource Management Practices, Mixed method, Philippines, Sustainability of the schools, Non-sectarian, Zambales

INTRODUCTION

Schools served as educational centers and institutions of learning. The main goal of the school was to develop young minds and provide quality education. It serves as a dwelling where students acquire skills and form a knowledge base to carry towards adulthood and become responsible members of society. Macasinag (2019) research study focused on a privately-owned, non-religious institution that has been operating for over fifty years and has experienced two generational transitions under the leadership of its sole founder. The study identified nine key themes that played a significant role in the school's success. These themes include the presence of a positive corporate culture and values, a shared vision among stakeholders, a commitment to corporate social responsibility, effective corporate governance, a strong focus on human resource development, a transformative style of leadership, a strong family culture, a well-defined succession plan, and effective business strategies. These attributes and practices have contributed to the institution's achievements as a family-owned higher education establishment. Zahra et al. point out that family firms commonly exhibit unique organizational cultures that prioritize long-term stability and cohesive values, setting them apart from non-family enterprises (Zahra et al., 2004). Moreover, Musendekwa et al. (2022) underscore the need for continuous quality improvement practices within accredited institutions to bolster enrollment figures and achieves commendable performance in Board examinations (Commission on Higher Education, 2014). Further contributing to this discussion is (Ramani et al., 2010), who propose integrated sustainable lifecycle design as a pivotal strategy for achieving sustainability in product development. The importance of adaptation is further elaborated by (Dirani & Hamie, 2017), who discuss educational reforms in the Middle East, specifically noting that for systems to improve continuously, they must develop human resources effectively to meet global standards. Moreover, (Filho et al., 2019) discuss the pivotal role of planning in implementing sustainable development within the context of higher education. Effective human resource planning is crucial, as disorganization can lead to significant issues. HEIs' impact on sustainable development spans



education, research, campus operations, and governance (Findler et al., 2019). Further, (Budihardjo et al., 2021) highlight the challenges faced by HEIs in teaching and embedding sustainability into their educational offerings, particularly as they strive to meet the demands of a changing world. Their SWOT analysis identifies key areas for improvement and outlines strategies to enhance the sustainability focus within higher education. Nowadays, many of our children attend various schools, including public, private, and nonsectarian institutions. Whatever type of schools they intend to enter, the primary goal of these types of schools is to give quality education to learners. In the Department of Education, under DepEd Order No. 009 s. 2021, “The Department of Education is committed to providing learners with quality basic education that is accessible, inclusive, and liberating through 1. Proactive leadership 2. Shared governance 3. Evidence-based policies, standards, and programs 4. Responsive and relevant curricula 5. Highly competent and committed officials, teaching and non-teaching personnel, and 6. An enabling environment. The Department upholds the highest standards of conduct and performance to fulfill stakeholders’ needs and expectations by adhering to constitutional mandates and statutory and regulatory requirements. It also sustains client satisfaction through continuous improvement of the Quality Management System.” In different schools under the Department of Education, like in public schools. Ghazali et al. (2020) stress the significance of entrepreneurial leadership practices among school principals, particularly with regard to fundraising and resource acquisition. Sumual et al. (2024) emphasize the pivotal role of principals as leaders in the planning and management of educational finance. According to Tenuto et al. (2015), the ability to manage public resources effectively while navigating the emotional and social dynamics within school environments is essential for school leaders. Private non-sectarian schools operate with different quality management systems influenced by factors like enrollment numbers, years in operation, and teacher count. Unlike other schools, they do not receive DepEd's Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), leading them to implement strict financial controls and seek alternative funding sources for sustainability. This study suggests that school managers need essential skills to manage resources effectively, addressing the role of financial stewardship and human resource practices in ensuring the sustainability of private non-sectarian schools in Zambales during the Academic Year 2022-2023.

FRAMEWORK

Financial stewardship and human resource practices are crucial in ensuring the sustainability of private non-sectarian institutions. This study explores the significance of these two factors in creating a sustainable educational environment. By examining the relationship between financial management and human resource practices, we can gain insights into how schools can effectively manage their resources and personnel to achieve long-term sustainability.

Education systems worldwide are undergoing reforms and changes to ensure the provision of quality education, particularly in developing countries such as Kuwait, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, African countries, and Pakistan (Alsaleh, 2019; Dorji et al., 2019). Moreover, Malik et al. (2020) explore the intersection of green human resource management practices and organizational sustainability. Their research indicates that sustainable HR practices, when strategically implemented, can help cultivate employees who are environmentally conscious and committed to corporate sustainability initiatives.

For instance, according to (Tawfig & Kamarudin, 2022), integrating strategic human resource management practices can lead to sustained improvements in teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes as they recognize the synergies between various factors. Further illuminating the



relationship between teacher quality and educational outcomes, Khairiyah et al. (2024) stress that quality not only depends on teachers' skills and training but also on the support mechanisms of school systems.

To enhance organizational performance through employee development, research suggests implementing various human resource management practices. Madero et al. (2023) discuss a systems theory perspective, illustrating how increased awareness of environmental issues among employees leads to more proactive organizational measures regarding sustainability, creating a virtuous cycle that benefits both parties.

Sustainable human resource management practices, when effectively implemented by an organization, can lead to improved performance among associated organizations. This positive impact on employee performance has been supported by various studies (Aedi & Herawan, 2019), assert that sustainable human resource practices have a significant favorable on employee performance. This positive influence is further reinforced by the findings of Lee (2019), who highlight the mediation process through which human resource management practices enhance employee performance. Regarding predicting psychological ownership and performance, several categories of sustainable human resource management practices have been considered, including employability, sense of personal responsibility, work-life balance, health conditions, and sustainability training.

Sustainable human resource management encompasses diverse management practices, as well as the belief that all employees within an organization require ongoing development and equal treatment.

Furthermore, (Mudzi & Mudzi, 2022) emphasize that the pandemic provided opportunities for postgraduate students to enhance their research capabilities through independent learning and consultation with supervisors. In the Philippines, financing school education has become a significant challenge, resulting in severe consequences for maintaining a high standard of learning during the pandemic. Academic institutions experienced severe financial strain as a direct result of the epidemic. The upcoming enrollment for courses and programs is uncertain and expected to vary significantly. The current decline in enrollment in private education, the decrease in accreditation affiliation with evangelical Christian schools, and the rise in school closures raise concerns about the sustainability of K-12 Christian education in the United States. K-12 Christian school teachers' perspectives reflect this shift, where traditional understandings of faith integration in learning may no longer resonate with a growing segment of the student population (Macasinag, 2019). Furthermore, the Independent School Management (ISM) group has identified three critical indicators of stability for the sustainability of non-public K-12 schools: (a) a balanced mix of cash reserves, debt, and endowment, (b) a strategic plan and financial plan, and (c) executive solid leadership (Independent School Management, 2015). ISM is a research organization dedicated to advancing school management and providing innovative strategies through extensive research. These sustainability markers identified by ISM emphasize the importance of adhering to best practices in financial management, strategic planning, and leadership. The responsibility for enrollment is critical; as private institutions depend heavily on tuition for financial viability, effective leadership in this area can significantly influence a school's sustainability. Research by Dagumboy (2022) suggests that comprehensive marketing strategies, aligned with the institution's mission and community engagement, can enhance enrollment rates and retention. Forfang (2020) explores the relationships and interactions between school owners and principals, noting that collaboration in resource management fosters improved educational outcomes. These resources were entrusted to them for effective financial management. To ensure successful education, all available resources, whether human, material, physical, or financial, must be handled effectively. All available resources, whether they be human, material, physical, or financial, must be handled effectively to



ensure successful education. Mabi & Buluma (2024) take an investigative approach by conducting a systematic review of financial management practices and their impact on service delivery in secondary schools.

The challenges faced by school leaders in K-12 Christian schools have resulted in a high turnover rate. According to Independent School Management, one in every five leaders of private schools leaves their position each year. This research also reveals that the average tenure of a private school leader is approximately four years, which is not enough time to establish consistency and ensure the organization's sustainability. Equally concerning is the finding that one in ten private school leaders completely resign from their role, as discovered by Independent School Management. The increasing demands on Christian school leaders, coupled with attrition, competition, and accountability, have led to the closure of over 500 Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited Christian schools in the northeast alone between 2009 and 2013 (Private School Enrollment Dips, 2013). The decline in enrollments and the rising number of K-12 Christian school closures threaten the availability of Christian schooling options for families in the United States.

Ernawati et al. (2021) further support the claim that proper resource management through school-based management systems can enhance educational effectiveness. Their research highlights that aligning local school management with educational goals promotes efficiency and resource optimization. This is essential to avoid unnecessary costs and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in educational settings. Managing school resources involves maximizing all available resources to achieve educational goals and objectives. It involves providing and mobilizing the necessary resources to ensure their full and effective utilization. Therefore, the dimensions of resource management investigated in this study include effective planning, budgeting, allocation, and control of human, material/physical, and financial assets within an organization.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to assess the role of financial stewardship and human resource practices in contributing to the sustainability of private non-sectarian schools in Zambales during the academic year 2022-2023. The research sought to profile the schools by examining the number of years in operation, total student enrollment, and the number of teaching and non-teaching personnel. It described the financial stewardship of these schools in terms of financial competence, budget control, auditing, and financial management competence. Additionally, it analyzed the human resource management practices, focusing on reward management, training and development, performance management, and career management. The study also evaluated how participants assessed school sustainability concerning setting priorities, building relationships, effectiveness, and overcoming barriers. Furthermore, it examined significant variables in financial control and human resource management practices across schools and explored the relationships between financial stewardship, HR practices, and school sustainability. Finally, the study identified perceived challenges affecting financial stewardship, HR practices, and school sustainability, with the findings intended to inform the sustainability plan.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used mixed methods using sequential exploratory design to answer its research problems. (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2008) elaborate on how research manuscripts contribute to the



mixed methods field, pointing out that studies often integrate diverse arguments for their contributions. Some procedural issues related to the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, which implies collecting and analyzing quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study.

The flexibility of the convergent mixed method design lies in its ability to address complex research questions by leveraging the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Fetters et al. (2013), integrating data from different sources allows researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of phenomena, uncovering insights that might be overlooked when using a single-method approach. Snelson (2016) points out that the exploratory sequential design can be designed to mirror an exploratory approach, where qualitative data is employed first to inform quantitative data collection later on. Leiva et al. (2020) demonstrate the utility of such designs in understanding the effectiveness of interventions within educational communities, showcasing how integrating different data types can lead to actionable insights. Kunicki et al. (2024) conducted a psychometric evaluation involving quantitative measures within undergraduate populations, showing how a descriptive quantitative framework can yield reliable insights that inform educational strategies and curricular development. This methodology quantitatively described the respondents based on the profile and strategies described to address the role of financial stewardship and human resource practices in school sustainability among private non-sectarian institutions. This entailed administering surveys to collect numerical data, which were analyzed statistically. Qualitative methodologies are exceptionally effective in addressing the uniqueness of sociocultural phenomena, as highlighted by several studies, including those by Thi et al. (2022) and (Kahlke, 2014). This approach is used to explore and understand the experiences of school heads in addressing the role of financial stewardship and human resource practices in school sustainability. This included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and the resulting data will be analyzed thematically. The mixed method convergent design was where the results from the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study were compared to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of financial stewardship and human resource practices in school sustainability.

Research Site

The study was conducted in the Schools Division of Zambales, located in the province of Zambales. The participants were selected from 15 Non-Sectarian Schools in the province: Amado Barrera Educational Center, Inc.; Best Child Learning Center, Inc.; Brightleaves High School Inc.; Cabangan Learning and Development Center, Inc.; Challenger Montessori School Inc.; College of Hildagrade Von Bingen, Inc.; College of Subic Montessori-Zambales Inc.; Holy Family Academy of Zambales, Inc.; Iba Kiddie Learning Center, Inc.; Lucio Abrigo Memorial Learning Center; Micro Asia College of Science and Technology; Northern Zambales College; Precious Child Montessori of Zambales, Inc.; SmartKids Montessori, Inc.; Zambales Central Institute.

Participants

The respondents of the study were the Select Administrative Personnel of the fifteen (15) Non-sectarian Schools with the assessment of their three-year data of financial stewardship and resource management practices in the Division of Zambales. For the qualitative data, 8 participants will be initially interviewed. They were picked based on the researcher's judgment and endorsement from other school heads. The primary marker will be the ability to verbally express insights and experiences related to the role of financial stewardship and human resource practices. Additional participants shall



be gathered if initial findings require it. Each selected school will be asked to read and sign an informed consent form before participating.

Instrumentation

The researcher designed the study's research instruments to align with specific research objectives and questions. A structured questionnaire was used for the quantitative part, including demographic details and Likert-scale items focused on financial stewardship and human resource practices, developed from literature and definitions. It was administered online to school heads for efficient data collection. For the qualitative part, a semi-structured interview guide was created to explore school heads' experiences in-depth. To ensure the questionnaire's reliability, the researcher sought input from experts and the dissertation adviser and conducted a trial run with non-participating schools, enhancing its reliability and validity.

Data Collection

I. Permissions and Ethical Clearances

A. Obtain necessary permissions

1. Dean of the Graduate School
2. School Division Superintendent
3. District Supervisor
4. School Principal

B. Secure ethical clearances

II. Preliminary Phase

A. Pre-survey meeting with target participants

1. Explain the purpose and nature of the study
2. Secure informed consent
3. Ensure confidentiality and anonymity of responses

III. Distribution of Questionnaire

A. Use of online platform

B. Allow suitable period for completion

C. Reminders and follow-ups

1. Assistance of district supervisors
2. Send reminders
3. Make follow-up calls to ensure high response rate

IV. Qualitative Data Collection

A. Conduct in-depth interviews

1. Select school heads
2. Investigate experiences and perspectives on:
 - a. Role of financial stewardship
 - b. Human resource practices
 - c. School sustainability among private nonsectarian institutions
3. Audio-record interviews with participants' consent

V. Data Analysis

A. Quantitative Analysis

1. Collect and input survey responses into statistical software
- B. Qualitative Analysis



1. Transcribe interview recordings verbatim
2. Analyze qualitative data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The profile of the School is described in terms of the number of years in operation, total number of student enrollees, and number of teaching and non-teaching personnel.

The data provided insights into the educational landscape of Zambales, showcasing the diversity in school operations, student enrollment, and staffing. This information can be valuable for policymakers, educators, and parents in understanding the educational resources available in the Division of Zambales.

2. Financial stewardship of the schools is described by financial competence, budget control, auditing, and financial management competence.

2.1 Financial Competence

The findings focused on their mastery of financial planning and control, ability to direct and monitor financial resources effectively, preparation of cash projections, implementation of proper bookkeeping practices, and delivery of accurate financial reports. The respondents strongly agreed with all these aspects, with an overall agreement rating of 3.73. This indicates that the Administrator/School Head/Finance Officer plays a pivotal role in achieving effective financial management in educational institutions.

2.2 Budget Control

The data on budget control highlights the financial stewardship practices in educational institutions, showing that teachers' involvement in the budgeting process is valued. Institutions demonstrate a commitment to financial responsibility by adhering to budgets and regularly conducting budget variance analyses and financial reviews. This proactive approach indicates a strong focus on maintaining the financial health of the institution. Overall, financial stewardship is prioritized, with participants showing firm agreement on its importance.

2.3 Auditing

The data emphasized the importance of establishing comprehensive audit procedures in schools. Such procedures promote effective financial management by providing guidelines and standards for conducting audits. This indicates a proactive approach to financial stewardship and a commitment to ensuring transparency and accountability in school finances.

2.4 Financial Management Competence

The participants strongly agreed that the implementation of comprehensive audit procedures promotes effective financial management. This suggested that regular audits are conducted to ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to financial regulations and policies.

3. Human Resource Management practices of schools may be described in terms of reward management, training and development, performance management, and career management.

3.1 Reward Management

The alignment of the reward management system with the overall organizational goals and values is an important factor in ensuring that rewards are linked to desired outcomes and behaviors, with a weighted mean of 3.70. The high agreement level in this aspect suggests that the current system effectively supports the organization's objectives.

3.2 Training and Development



The school's training and development programs are highly effective and well-regarded by the participants. The positive feedback received highlights the success of these programs in addressing skills and knowledge gaps, promoting continuous learning and professional growth, and positively impacting overall management and performance within the school.

3.3 Performance Management

The performance management processes at the school are well-communicated, ensuring staff understands expectations and procedures. Performance goals are aligned with the school's objectives, highlighting a focus on organizational priorities. The evaluation of employee contributions is fair and reliable, creating a motivating environment that values staff efforts. These practices significantly contribute to school improvement and positive student outcomes, reflecting their effectiveness. Overall, strong agreement ratings indicate a positive perception of performance management at the school.

3.4 Career Management

Employees feel that their career progression is based on merits and supported by the HR processes having a descriptive rating of 3.74 also. This indicates that the HR department has established fair and transparent processes for career advancement, which contributes to employee satisfaction and engagement.

4. Participants assess the sustainability of the school in terms of setting priorities, building relationships, effectiveness, and overcoming barriers.

4.1 Setting Priority

The priority of school sustainability was assessed based on three key factors. Firstly, there is a strong agreement that the program serves a critical need for the school. Secondly, the program and activity address outcomes that are highly valued by school personnel. Lastly, parents are actively involved in the activities and program effort. The average rating for school sustainability priority is 3.69, indicating a strong agreement.

4.2 Building Partnership

The administrator/finance officer's dedication to building leadership within the school is evident through their strong agreement with the survey statements. These findings suggest a promising environment for leadership growth and development within the school community.

4.3 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of school sustainability practices and strategies indicated that the practices and strategies implemented as part of activities and programs are evidence-based. Additionally, school personnel recognize the positive effects of these activities and programs. Furthermore, the school administrator responsible for implementing these activities and programs is described as knowledgeable and skillful. These findings suggest that the practices and strategies implemented are successful in achieving their intended outcomes.

4.4 Overcoming Barriers

The barriers faced by schools in terms of sustainability showed strong agreement on various strategies to overcome these barriers. Efforts to build consensus on core values, beliefs, and goals are recommended. Additionally, the school administrator should review new initiatives and identify how activities and programs can contribute to overcoming shifting priorities. Communication and representation with various groups within the school are also key to addressing general school turnover. To mitigate "champion" turnover, it is suggested to share leadership and expertise among multiple school personnel.

5. Significant variables in the financial control and human resource management practices across schools



Financial Competence showed a significant variation, with an F-value of 8.235 and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that the null hypothesis (H_0) can be rejected, suggesting that there are significant differences in financial competence among the schools.

On the other hand, Budget Control and Auditing did not show significant variations. Variables had p-values above the 5% alpha level, indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) cannot be rejected. This suggests no significant differences in budget control and auditing across the schools.

6. Significant Relationships among financial stewardship and HR practices and school sustainability.

The Pearson r correlation results for the relationship between Financial Stewardship, HRM (Human Resource Management), and School Sustainability. The correlation coefficient (r -value) and statistical significance (p-value) were calculated for each relationship. The results indicate strong positive correlations between Financial Stewardship and School Sustainability.

7. Perceived Challenges affect financial stewardship, HR practice, and school sustainability.

Non-sectarian schools face various challenges that can affect their financial stewardship, HR practices, and overall sustainability. These challenges include declining enrollment, competition from other schools, limited funding sources, higher operational costs, high staff turnover, and the need to secure long-term sustainability.

Declining enrollment poses a direct impact on the financial stability of non-sectarian schools. With fewer students, these schools struggle to generate sufficient revenue to cover their expenses.

Competition from other private schools is another challenge that non-sectarian schools face. This competition makes it difficult for them to attract and retain students, which in turn affects their financial position. Unlike sectarian schools, non-sectarian schools may not have access to specific funding sources, such as donations from religious organizations. This limitation forces them to rely heavily on tuition fees and government funding, which may not always be sufficient.

Higher operational costs are also a challenge for non-sectarian schools. Without financial support from religious organizations, these schools need to allocate more resources towards marketing, student recruitment, and facilities maintenance, putting a strain on their financial resources.

Non-sectarian schools may experience higher staff turnover compared to sectarian schools. Factors such as relatively lower salaries and benefits compared to public or religious-affiliated schools contribute to this turnover. High turnover can impact staff morale, disrupt continuity, and require additional resources for recruitment and training.

Establishing long-term sustainability is a struggle for non-sectarian schools due to intense competition and limited funding. Building a strong alumni network and forging partnerships with local businesses and organizations can help secure long-term sustainability, but this requires additional effort and resources.

CONCLUSION

Non-sectarian schools face several challenges in terms of financial stewardship, HR practices, and sustainability; overcoming these challenges requires careful planning, effective management, resource optimization, and strategic partnerships to ensure the school's long-term viability and success.

The Administrator/School Head/Finance Officer demonstrates a high level of financial competence and is proficient in various financial tasks. Their expertise in financial planning, control, and reporting contributes significantly to the effective management of financial resources in educational institutions.



Financial management in nonsectarian secondary schools is perceived to be highly effective. This positive assessment reflects the commitment of administrators, school heads, and finance officers to maintain sound financial practices in their institutions.

Positive perception and satisfaction with the reward management system in the school. The findings highlight the importance of a well-designed and transparent reward system that aligns with organizational goals and values to motivate and engage employees effectively.

The significant contribution of performance management practices to school improvement and positive student outcomes indicates the effectiveness and impact of these practices. The strong agreement ratings reflect a positive perception of performance management at the school.

The school's HR department is highly effective in career management, as evidenced by the positive survey responses. The department's clear and accessible resources, support for professional growth and development, effective communication of job opportunities, and active feedback-seeking practices contribute to a positive career management experience for employees.

The findings indicate a strong agreement on the importance of overcoming barriers to achieve school sustainability.

Non-sectarian schools faced challenges related to declining enrollment, competition, limited funding sources, higher operational costs, high staff turnover, and the need for long-term sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, effective marketing, and building strong partnerships to secure the financial stability and sustainability of these schools.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

To ensure that the findings of this study on financial stewardship, human resource practices, and school sustainability are effectively translated into actionable insights, a policy-oriented approach will be adopted. The study's outcomes will be synthesized into policy briefs and guidelines aimed at school administrators, educational policymakers, and stakeholders in the education sector. These policy documents will provide clear, evidence-based recommendations on improving financial management and HR practices to enhance school sustainability. The guidelines will outline specific actions that schools can take to strengthen financial competence, budget control, and HR management, addressing the challenges identified in the research. By focusing on the policy aspect, the study's findings will be strategically aligned with existing educational frameworks, helping to shape informed decision-making and fostering a culture of sustainability across private non-sectarian schools in Zambales.

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